

THE MYSTERIES OF THE MOGUL DARBAR

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The Mysteries of the Magul Darbar

CHAPTER I

CONT'D

Today the fort of Agra was in a stir owing to various reasons. A thousand Rajput horsemen were assembled at the gate. They were all ready for war. The people of Agra were frightened at thinking that something serious might take place. Now war tired them in the face. To peal the truth the whole town had been converted into the battle field. There were Mogul and Rajput soldiers all around. Wherever you turn your eyes, you would find Mogul and Rajput cavalry. On finding numberless Rajput soldier within the fort all on a sudden the Mogul general looked at them surprised and more so as they had an unknown person as their commander. They asked one another,—

"Who is this? He doesn't look like a Rajput. Is he a Mogul then?"

Unable to resist the curiosities a few Mogul soldiers went up to the Rajput and questioned,—

"Who is this—your newly-appointed general?"

The person so addressed were not glad at this question, but said rather bluffly —

Go and ask your prince.

At this the Mogul left without a word

The appearance of the Rajputs in the fort the appointment of a new general—all these caused a commotion within the fort indeed, but greater was the commotion when Dara gave out —

I forgive Fatema this time and without trial Let her off and be sent to her mistress' mahal.

Fatema who had been confined in a small cell within the Begum mahal was well aware that Dara was a mere puppet in the hands of princess Jahanara and that the princess was dead against her and that the brother would do whatever the sister would suggest. Therefore it was simply hoping against hope to escape capital punishment at their hands. But she knew also that her own mistress, none the less powerful would be the last person to brook any injury done to her bandi. She was oscillating sitting in the cradle of doubt, the condition of her mind could not be described then. She had been in the Begum mahal for about thirty years and had never fallen into any danger before. Here everybody remained putting his life into the jaws of death. Would she lose her life at the hands of the executioner then? Would she not enjoy the money she had accumulated since her arrival into the Begum mahal then?

Suddenly she stood startled her heart began to

beat with force as the time of her trial drew nigh. The sentinels were opening the door of the cell in which she lay confined. Fatema was not nervous by nature, and yet her whole frame shook violently for a moment.

At this stage the door opened. Gama addressed her with a letter in hand,—

“Fatema. Bibi, you have received pardon at the hands of the prince. Go to your own mahal. You are always fortunate. Take this note and give it to your princess”

“Pardon! Not even trial! This is real influence. Fatema praised Roshenara inwardly a thousand times. Then she spoke out,—

“I knew full well no body could do me any harm so long as the princess would be alive. Just see Dara and Jahanara have pardoned me only for fear of our princess”

Fatema, released, ran towards Roshenara’s mahal in a feverish excitement. At such an action on Fatema’s part other bandis felt surprised and said to themselves,—

“Has Fatema broken the jail then? No, absurd on the very face of it. Isn’t that the prince has allowed her to go scot-free?”

In fact all of them felt extremely curious, but no body dared to ask Fatema anything. Roshnara was not a little surprised at Fatema’s appearance. She ejaculated,—

"Fatema! What's the matter? You are let off?"

At this Fatema looked at her mistress' face with the words—

'Released for your sake! Is there anyone under the sun who is not afraid of you?"

'What have you got in your hand?"

"Sorry I forgot about it altogether. This is a letter for you from the prince."

Upon this Roshenara snatched away the letter and read it. It ran thus—

My dear sister

I find no trial of your bandi is necessary as she left the Begum Mahal with your permission. I have, therefore ordered her release. As I am extremely busy with state affairs, I have not a minute to call my own or I would have seen and told you everything in person.

Yours affectionately

DARA

On perusing the letter Roshenara laughed in her sleeve. She said,—

'Don't think you have got your release for fear to me. There is a grave reason in this."

Greatly surprised the bandi turned towards her mistress face. She enquired—

'What is that grave reason, pray?"

'There is something within. You would know it latter on. Go and tell Gama that I would go for a

stroll in the Khusru Bagh and he must make every *bandobast* for it You must accompany me”.

Fatema left. On the way she met Prince Dara who was also going out On finding him the bandi gave him *kurnishes* The prince addressed her rather with a laugh,—

“I say, Fatema, don’t do this again. Someday you would fall into danger! I must admit however, that much credit lies with you in your flight from the palki.”

With these words Dara went away laughing But Fatema felt astounded at the last words used by the prince She kept standing still for a while, then she looked around with dismay. Finding nobody there she proceeded towards Gama’s quarters

There is hardly any difference between the king and his people when a war actually breaks out or is threatened , at such a time the commander, nay the Badshah, sometimes has to take meals in common with the soldiers under a tree, if necessity arises. Now war was threatened all over and the emperor was down with illness , so the Government of the land lay entirely in Dara’s hands Dara was busy looking after state business day and night He was hardly to be seen before, having spent his time in religious topic with learned men But now he had to give up all this and enter into warfare though against his will It was time Lali Sahib was entrusted with the order to see that the soldiers within the fort were doing their

duty properly, Dara went in person from time to time and watched everything as he knew that his son with all his bravery and experience was not mature in age. It was the height of misfortune to the Mogul that Aurangzeb succeeded to the throne after Shah Jahan and not Dara.

On coming out Dara found that the Rajput horsemen kept standing in numbers on the plain in front of the fort with their new commander mounted on a big mettle-some horse with a drawn sword in hand. He had a very imposing look with a warrior's dress. Dara felt very delighted at his composed attitude, saying to him —

"This young man possesses real worth. Lali has done well in securing his services at this time or he would surely have joined the enemy"

On finding Dara Sailesh Ray saluted him lifting his sword over his head. Dara stepped up towards him saying —

"You need not wait at the fort. You just go to your camp and have rest for sometime I will send you word when necessary"

At this Sailesh saluted him a second time and then he addressed the Rajputs something before he galloped off. He was followed by one thousand troops.

When they were out of sight, the prince was going within the fort but he heard some row at the fort gate. Some body was trying to get into the fort but was not allowed to do so hence the row. The prince halted.

Then he ordered his men to allow the person coming inside. As soon as the order reached the ears of the sentinels, they made way for the new comer. Then a young person came in front of the prince. That person had a common Persian dress on with a sharp dagger in hand and with a long black cap and a waist band at the waist from which a big sword was hanging.

From appearance the person looked to be only twenty with traces of new moustaches and a beard—in fact a very handsome look. The person came up before the prince, *kurnishing*. The Prince interrogated,—

“What do you want?”

“Service under the state” was the modest reply.

“In what capacity?” demanded the prince with crude eyes.

“As a common soldier to start with, but eventually a commander of ten thousand soldiers” was the reply.

At this the prince only smiled. He demanded,—

“Are you known to any person here?”

“No one, I am an inhabitant of Persia but I have left home without any body’s knowledge. Only this morning I arrived here. How can I be known any person here then?” rejoined the youth.

“What led you to leave home in this fashion? Have you not got any relatives at home?”

“They are all dead and that’s why I have come to the Mogul court with high aspirations.”

"Is the Mogul Court a machine for making millionaires?" questioned the prince with a smile.

"Whoever possesses real worth—why should he not aspire to become rich?" was the emphatic reply.

"Are you confident you possess real worth?"

"I am. At present I want nothing more than the post of a common soldier. After this warfare I aspire to be the commander as already intimated."

"Have you heard of this impending warfare?"

"I have heard about it throughout the journey. Everybody says that many soldiers would be requisitioned now. Therefore I have come here."

"Why have you not gone to the other side?"

"I have heard of which stuff the princes are made individually. Out of these four I consider you and you only to be fit for the throne and therefore I call upon your august personage craving only the post of a soldier. Nothing more is hankered after by this humble self."

"What proof is there you are not a spy from the other side?"

"Heroes always take into their confidence the words that come from the lips of heroes."

The prince felt extremely rejoiced at the impudent words of the youth. He said with a laugh—

"I am not the commander of the fort. There he comes. You just submit your petition before him."

When Lali Sahib made his appearance, the prince addressed him—

"Lali, this Persian youth wants a job here as a soldier Take him if you like I have no objection He possesses spirit, I find.

With these words the prince withdrew, Lali Sahib fixed a rude stare on the youth for sometime and then said to himself,—

" It must be some other person I could have easily made out if it had been Motiya. Hundreds of persons are coming to the court from Persia and this must be one of 'them."

The youth kept standing before Lali Sahib quite grave Lali's stare did not make her muscles move, so that his suspicion became confirmed now—that it was not Motiya who was before him She had told him already she would assume the garb of a Persian youth, but it is not she surely "

Turning his look away Lali demanded,—

" What is your prayer "

" Lord of my heart, I want you and "nothing more" was the smiling and subdued reply

CHAPTER II

KHUSRU BAGH

For the comfort of his beloved daughters Shah Jahan had caused two beautiful garden houses built on the banks of the Jumna outside the fort and town of Agra, one to the east, the other to the west. Those two gardens had no rivals at the time we are speaking of.

Within these two gardens there were innumerable beautiful marble fountains and beds of fragrant flower trees. On entering the gardens one would feel quite delighted and his heart buoyed up with the sweet scent of the flowers.

It was Begum Nurjahan who broke the trammels of Muhammedan society and sat in the open durbar for the first time. It was she who went to the field on elephant back. But Roshenara and Jahanara had probably out—Nurjahane Nurjahan in this respect. They broke the Mahamedan custom and appeared before male persons to which the orthodox Muhammedans took great exception but none dared to speak any thing against this revolting action on their part. The anger of two tigresses meant nothing short of decap-

tation There was no knowing how many had fallen victims through the mercy of these tyrants. But it was doubtful how far they took an active part in these heinous acts. They did not know even the hundredth part of the various atrocities committed by their parasites Was there any body who could write the Mysteries of the Mogul Darbar in all their details ?

The Khusru Bagh was Roshenara's personal property Here she used to come with her bandis whenever she chose, sometimes she spent a few days in this garden house when waves of mirth and luxury flowed incessantly. The melodious songs of the best dancing girls made the place sweeter But different was the case in the Amina Bagh where mirth was rather at a discount. Jahanara never spent nights here. She used to come to the garden in the afternoon and returned before dusk Since Taj Mahal's death she discontinued her visits to this garden. But she came here for a day with the object of seeing Sailesh Ray Roshenara who had no merriments at home like her sister rolled in pleasures while in the garden house, but to day she had no sort of mirth and had no dancing girls with her. It was only Fatema who had accompanied her and no body else

Gama was at the gate keeping in silent watch with his men The garden was surrounded by high walls There was no other entrance to the garden except the front gate There was a beautiful palace within this

handsome garden each chamber looking like a picture. The beauty of the place could be more imagined than described. Everything was grand, magnificent and superb. The whole palace was perfumed with some divine exhilarating fragrance. Probably the poet's paradise could not compare with this pleasure-garden in point of beauty.

Extremely anxious Roshenara looked while in the garden. Fatema was beside her but she had not the courage to ask her anything. Gradually the sun tinged in gold set in the western sky gradually *everything became dark* the *khojas* came and lighted the lamps and so the beauty of the place increased a thousand fold.

Even then Roshenara was absent minded leaving upon the bolster in a reclining posture. Fatema had placed before her the jewelled beteltray but the princess took no notice of it. At this time the sound caused by palki bearers while carrying passengers fell upon her ear. The princess got startled and simultaneously her beautiful eyes fired up. She took a betel and *Surhi* and wiped off her face with the perfumed handkerchief lying by her side.

The bearers put down a covered palki in front of the palace and went outside the garden. From the nature of the conveyance it could reasonably be presumed that the wife of a big personage must have come to see the princess, but lo ! it was not a woman but an elderly Musulman with a long beard probably some

Omrao of high position. Having stared an anxious look all around he went into the chamber in quick steps

The man who came in was about sixty but from his physique it was evident he possessed enormous strength. Even at that age he could easily stand as a warrior in a battle-field.

In the first chamber Fatema was awaiting his arrival. As soon as he made his appearance, Fatema accosted him with due respect to come in, adding that the princess was waiting for him. Without saying a word the Mogul followed Fatema and when she came up to the princess' chamber, she asked him to go right in and then went away. The new comer looked around as he went inside and made his obeisance to the princess

Roshenara addressed him,—

“Take your seat, Sardar Sahib. I have summoned you on an urgent business.”

Having taken his seat the Mogul said,—

Is there any chance of anybody's coming to know that I have been here?”

“Khan Sahib, everybody not excluding my khoja Gama is under the impression that your daughter is coming to see me here in this garden from the house of the Mogul commander. But the fact that you have been here is known to Fatema only. Her you could safely trust” returned Roshenara.

Husain Khan the general replied,—

"Then I understand that there would be a serious row when people would come to know I have been here."

"Is there any other body within the garden?" It seems that there is a sound of foot-steps near the window" returned Husain Khan.

At this princess stood up saying she, too had heard that. She added —

"I have left strict orders with Gama not to allow any body coming in. He has turned out the gardeners also. Perhaps Fatema has gone that side and hence her foot-steps"

The princess proceeded towards the window with Husain Khan at her heels. It was not so dark outside. The princess looked in all directions carefully but found no body. Then she said it must be a jackal. Now come and sit down. Rest assured Gama won't let any body come in."

When both of them were seated the princess observed —

"Sardar Sahib surely you don't wish the decline of the Mogul empire."

"Certainly not. Which Mogul would wish that?" was the emphatic reply

"Should Dara sit on the throne that would mean decline of the Mogul empire. He is a Hindu and so his influential friends Jasobaht Singh Joy Singh and Raj Singh would be, virtually speaking the lords of the realm. Would they not?"

"In all probability, they would"

"Is it desirable, then?"

"By no means Brother Aurangzeb is the most intelligent of all. Whatever he has decided must be in the interest of the Mogul empire. He is a *fakir* and so my persuasions could not induce him to sit on the throne. This much he has promised that he would help Murad to secure the throne and would give him the best possible advice from behind through the midst of religious culture. He is an orthodox Muhamedan. Now if you care to see that the Muhamedan empire remains intact, should you not listen to what he says?"

"Princess! You say nothing but proper. Dara's accession to the throne or Jasabant Singh's accession is all the same to us. No Mogul or Musalman in the true sense of the word would like it"

"Then you consent to expose Aurangzeb's cause," questioned Roshenara in a tone of excitement

"In the event of a war, Mogul and Musulmans ought to side with Aurangzeb. The Rajputs should be crushed down or the Muhamedan empire would be extinct" replied the general.

"Why 'in the event of war'? The war is inevitable. Aurangzeb has started from the South. We have regular communication with each other" returned the princess

"I believe so. But meanwhile crafty Jasabant Singh

is trying to *chalan* Murad to Guzrat. rejoined Husain Khan.

' It is but idle to expect that.'

The fickle-minded impulsive Murad has forgot about the Dehli throne. He is simply infatuated to win the girl as his wife. I have heard from a reliable source that Jasobant Singh had sent an ambassador over to him. Murad has promised before that man to give up all hostile feelings towards father or brother only if he wins that girl as he is averse to strifes assuring also that liquor is his all-in-all and he would make for Guzrat without creating any disturbance" re-assured Hussain Khan.

Roshenara said in a langh —

" Jasobant Singh thinks himself to be very shrewd. He thinks of duping simple-hearted Murad with false hopes. But what are we for? With the most scrutinising search Jahanara has not come to know the whereabouts of that missing girl Ha-ha! Jasobant Singh would put that girl into Murad's hands and then send him over to Guzrat."

Husain Khan said in a solemn tone —

" Princess? I have learnt from a reliable source that the girl in question is in Jasobant Singh's hand"

Roshenara exclaimed in extreme surprise,—

' In Jasobant Singh's hands! Absurd!'

" I can't tell you for certain. As far as I have

come to know of it, I'm inclined to believe that the poor girl has fallen into Jasobant's hands" returned Husain Khan

Roshenara exclaimed twice or thrice,—

"A new story ! quite a new story !"

Then she burst out with an emotion,—

" If it be the fact, well and good Jahanara loves her as her own daughter and with her loss she has been sorely anxious Towards her search she has been moving heaven and earth Knowing all this the wicked Jasobant has kept the girl confined only to make her over to Murad If Jahanara comes to be enlightened with this fact, no body would be allowed to stay in the Mogul Court, be it Jasobant or any other person Now Sardar Sahib, are you sure of it ?"

" I can't tell you for certain but only guess From the manner with which Jasobant Singh is negotiating with Prince Murad, it seems that he has got the girl within his clutches It could not be joke," returned Husain Khan

" A strange story indeed ! This thing has never struck us If the girl has really fallen into Jasobant's hands, she must be at his palace at Agra, rejoined Roshenara.

" No, not that. She is not there, on enquiry I have come to know" re-assured Husain Khan

" Sardar Sahib, you surprise me ? An undreamt-of story ? I remarked one day that the girl in ques-

tion would be the cause of danger within the Mogul Court! now I find this is going to prove two strange story—really strange.'

CHAPTER III.

COMPENSATION FOR TREACHERY

There was silence for a while. The princess broke the ice saying,—

“ Either the girl is in the hands of Jasobant Singh or not, there would be a great conflagration when Jahanara would be convinced of this. And should the Rajput chief desert Dara, there would be little hope for him to secure the throne and so this would mean a sure success to us ”

“ We ought not to give the publicity to it until we are fully satisfied ” returned Husain Khan.

‘ I will give the matter my best consideration Roshenara is not the person to move so easily Meanwhile I must make enquiries whether the girl is really in Jasobant Singh’s hands. I have got spies all over, so that there is no hiding from me.’ re-assured Roshenara.

“ Everyone knows you to be the second Nurjahan ” returned the general

“ Nurjahan was all selfishness whereas the reverse is the case with me. What I have been doing is all for dear brothers, Murad and Aurangzeb also for the sake of Muhammedan religion and empire. Surely God would shower His best blessings upon me, ” observed the princess

While saying all this Roshenara's voice grew sad. All on a sudden she changed her voice and added in a soft tone,—

Then you consent to take our side, Sardar Sahib.

I cannot give my consent yet. Just see I have been eating emperor Shah Jahan's salt over four decades. To be plain I shall be the last person to accede to your proposal and unless and until there would be some special inducement' replied Husain Khan.

When Murad becomes the emperor you would be bedaubed with the title *Khane Khanan*."

This humble self is practically commander-in chief though not a *Khane Khanan*."

You would become a Subedar and you would have from the treasury as much money as you want over and above, you would receive the highest title from the Imperial Court, I warrant you.

But when Dara becomes the emperor I should have all these also without proving false with him. Dara being the eldest son the throne is his legally. Then why should I betray the confidence only to get all what I could by espousing his cause ?

At this Roshenara assumed a grave appearance. She observed in a soft tone,—

What more do you want ? Whoever sits on the throne, cannot possibly give you more than what I promise you. She added rather in a taunt —

Do you aspire after the Imperial throne then ?"

" What a question ' I'm not so audacious When there's a talk of bargaining, I had better be plain and frank , "I am emperor's commander-in-chief. You want me to side with Aurangzeb with all my troops during war This must have a consideration value as the work is extremely responsible and serious and the price must be in accordance with the seriousness of the task,"

" Let me hear what the price is "

The price is nothing more than your ownself For a long time I have loved you from the core of my heart I'm prepared to prove myself most treacherous and thus go to the dogs only if I can have you. Just swear that you would marry me I also swear that I would join Aurangzeb's party with all the troops

Upon this Roshenara's face became reddened Roshenara was no longer a young lady, but was rather advanced in years It was only the Omniscient God who knew what feelings had buoyed up within Roshenara's mind at that time. But she controlled herself and said in a smile,—

" My physical frame is nothing compared with Muhamedan religion and Muhamedan empire I shall feel gratified if I could be of any use towards the execution of this noble deed "

Elated with joy Husain Khan exclaimed,— " When you are graciously pleased to consent to my proposal, this humble self also consents to yours "

" It requires great good fortune to have a husband of your stamp, especially when my material body

preserves Muhammedan religion and empire" was the soft reply

Husain Khan now explained with vehemence —

" I also pledge myself to help Aurangzeb to sit on the throne."

But he said to himself —

Let the marriage take place first and then Husain Khan and nobody else, would be the emperor and you would be the second Nurjahan

Brother Aurangzeb is but a Fakir and he would be the last person to give up his religious propensities returned the princess.

Never mind There it is Murad who stands next was the emphatic reply

Roshenara stretched out her hand saying —

' Sardar Sahib just swear touching my hand.

At this Husain Khan held Roshenara a hand which abashed in softness the softest butter and outright an electric thrill passed through his body Then he swore to prove treacherous in the name of God Prophet the Koran—in fact in the name of everything that was held sacred It was the wickedness of these impious men which has brought about the extinction of the Muhammedan empire in India.

Roshenara with her ever fascinating smile took away her hand from that of the general adding —

I have also sworn that I would marry you when the war would be over"

Husain Khan questioned in a sad tone,—

" Not before the war ? "

" Before ? Impossible. Dara would stand in the way " was the reply

" You are right "

" The marriage will take place with Murad's accession to the throne

" What will become of the emperor, then ? "

" He in his illness cannot look after state affairs. He will remain as he is "

With these words Roshenara stood up and said,—

" Sardar Sahib This very night I have to give some instructions to a certain person as to our future proceedings. Now I wish you good bye."

Sardar Sahib exclaimed with an emotion,—

" All right my *salaams* "

Then the princess addressed him,—

" Just go within the *palki*. The bearers will be here soon "

At this Husain Khan went into the conveyance. Fatema called the bearers in. When the Sardar had left, Roshenara exclaimed with a choked voice grinding her teeth,—

" Crying for the moon ? what insolence ! "

On entering the room Roshenara ordered Fatema to bring a cup of liquor with which the bandi readily complied. The princess never took liquor before the public, otherwise she would not have pulled on well with Aurangzeb who was averse to liquor.

Having done full justice to the cup Roshenara took a betel saying —

‘Fatema, here’s a bit of welcome news.’

Quite surprised Fatema looked at her mistress face saying,—

‘What’s that welcome news, pray? I shall be quite rejoiced to hear it.’

‘My marriage, old as I am’ replied the princess in a laugh.

‘What do you mean? your marriage?’

Convulsed with laughter Roshenara returned —

‘What? Am I destined to die virgin?’

‘Not that princess. Certainly you are not past the age of marriage on the contrary. It is, a wonder that you have not thought of marriage so long.’

‘It is time that the wonder would come to an end.’

‘Who would be that fortunate fellow to win such a jewel pray?’

Husain Khan—the commander-in-chief of the Mogul.’

With evidened eyes Fatema ejaculated —

‘You mean that old scamp?’

‘Am I too young for him eh?’

At this stage Gama came with the news —

‘Hingan Khan at the door’

Then the princess addressed Gama,—

‘Send Hingan here. See that no one enters within.’

Roshenara addressed Fatema —

‘You just go to the other room. Keep close by’

Instantly Fatema left the place and Hingan made his appearance and began *kurnishing* His condition was no better than a dog flogged by its master The princess turned away her face with hatred Hers was a face which was rather hard to decipher, especially by Hingan who was noted for his stupidity.

The princess now addressed him in her usual fascinating tone,—

“ Just sit down, Hingan I have summoned you on a special business ”

At these words Hingan felt himself in an ecstasy. Having laughed a pleasant laugh he replied

“ This devoted slave is always ready to serve at your feet ”

Without heeding Hingan's words the princess interrogated,—

“ What can you do for me ? ”

“ I can lay down my life for you.” was the emphatic reply

Roshenara said in a laugh,—

“ Your life is not so valuable But for all that I don't wish your death. I simply want to know if you are prepared to hear what I would order you ”

“ I will carry out your orders to the very letter ”

“ Will you ? Are you sure of that ? ”

“ More than sure ”

“ Do you know that Bengali ? ”

“ Too well, Oh ? How much I have pleaded for him But I must call him treacherous ”

" You must have heard he is now Lall's right hand.

' I have just now heard he has been appointed commander of the Rajput soldiers. Wonder how he has influenced Lall Sahib."

With a greater gravity Roshenara replied —

" We have no business to enquire how he has become rich so suddenly. Now it is for you to see that the Rajputs turn him out."

At these words Hingan Khan ran his fingers through his hair. He replied —

" How is that possible ?

Roshenara gave a frown saying —

" As you were at friends with this Bengali at one time, you must try to secure his friendship again. But you must tell the Rajputs that it was the height of disgrace to them that they had a weak Bengali as their general. Well I can't tutor you every thing nor have I got the time for it. I hope you would be able to do this. The thing is that the Rajput ears must be poisoned and the Bengali must be turned out and in case of emergency both he and Lall must be removed. Now tell me if you are up to all this otherwise I must engage some other person remember "

Hearing of this un-dreamt-of proposal from the lips of the princess the weak minded Hingan Khan was quite bewildered. For a while he paused and remained silent like a dumb statue.

Finding Hingan in such a listless mood Roshenara added in a stentorian voice,—

"Don't you hear my words, you fool, or that you can't believe in what I say? What have you got to say? Do you want anything by way of *bakshees*? If so speak out. You shall have what you ask for."

Hingan was thinking within himself what reply he would make. At these hard words he said to himself,—

"What a cruel-hearted woman! She is up to anything. Whoever is desirous of getting rid of the divine brother Dara and his qualified son Lali Sahib can do anything to fulfil her motive. I ought not to keep silent. Come what may, I must ask for a big reward."

"You stupid fellow? You keep silent yet?" demanded Roshenara.

Hingan Khan replied trembling,—

"What would be my reward, princess?"

Roshenara returned in a disgusted tone,—

"Reward! What reward you want?"

"The Subedar of Kashmere besides a lac of gold coins"

"I agree. But remember you shall be devoured by dogs if you fail in your task."

Saying this the princess left the place like an infuriated lioness.

Hingan Khan still sat there. Then he withdrew thinking to himself what would be his fate in case he failed to achieve the work imposed on him.

CHAPTER IV

JASOBANT'S TRICKS.

As for an amicable settlement of the fraternal quarrel there was not the ghost of a chance. It was even during the life time of the emperor that all the four princesses were preparing themselves for warfare over the Imperial throne.

Murad had not gone to Guzrat. At the defiance of the Imperial firman he lay encamped at Malabar with his troops. He was not keen on the war but was absorbed in his usual revelries. During his lucid intervals he ordered —

I must have that girl I shan't be sorry in the least if it costs the emperor his life.

Gul Bahar had got a firm hold into his brain he could not shake her off by any means from his mind

But his general Toki Khan was not sitting idle. The shrewd Aurangzeb's letters to his brother Murad were nothing compared with those written to Toki Khan. Every letter contained lots of inducement especially his promise to make Toki Khan *Khase Khan* as he found no body else fit for that distinguished title.

Aurangzeb's seductive wiles simply turned the head of the general. Whatever the prince Aurangzeb ordered him to do he carried out like a sworn slave. At his

orders he increased his troops though with great difficulty, along with it he tried his hard to win over the Rajput soldier to his side. He also tried his best to create family dissension among the native chiefs by sending secret spies. He never thought it necessary to inform Murad as to his proceedings. He informed Aurangzeb direct everything he had found necessary.

Aurangzeb had almost been to the Deccan, but he gradually got back towards Agra. Whatever soldiers had fallen in his way, he tried to win over, along with it he tried hard to persuade the Rajput rulers. During the Muhamedan rule no other shrewd and crafty politician was to be found like him. Considering his spiritual propensity everybody took him for a true religionist and so he was held in the highest esteem by the Muhamedans, even the Moulvis became his slaves. They openly sang his praise and preached against Dara's infidelity, the result was he secured the highest influence among the Muhamedan society. It was rather doubtful how far he would have been successful in securing the esteem and confidence of the public if people had come to know his inward motive—it was nothing short of his aspiration for the Imperial throne through sheer hypocrisy.

Aurangzeb had no great confidence in warfare as its result was, in his opinion, so uncertain. He looked upon stratagem as the surest weapon. He knew full well that among the Rajput rulers there were three

Maharajas who were very powerful and excercised great influence men like Jasobant Singh of Marwar, Raj Singh of Mewar and Joy Singh of Ambar were wanting even during the reign of Akbar the Great. So long as these powerful men were on Dara's side, there was no chance of victory to him therefore Aurangzeb tried his hard to bring them within his clutches but he failed to attain his object though he moved heaven and earth over it. The Rajput chiefs told him pointblank that it was the height of folly on his part to commit such a heinous crime. As he was the root cause of all this mental trouble to his late father during his life time, he would receive the same compliments at the hands of his son. Sin has its own retribution in this world sure as fate. It was not the time to discuss these matters at that time. The Rajput chiefs spoke plainly that they had eaten the emperor's salt and would not prove treacherous and that they could not take part in that warfare on the contrary, they would rather exterminate the emperor's enemies to the very root.

It was therefore that Aurangzeb had to give up the hope of any help from the Rajputs but he could not give up the hope of sitting on the Imperial throne. Now there were only two means of securing the throne one was to win over the Moguls on the emperor's side to his own side which was not a very difficult thing, No body had studied the Mogul character so well as he so by various inducements and

persuasions he tried to bring them under his control. We had seen already that his shrewd sister Roshenara had become his chief help in this matter.

It did not take Aurangzeb long to understand that it was not an easy task for him to win over those chiefs as they had eaten the emperor's salt for over four decades. Even an infuriated elephant would be swept away like grass in the river of aspiration which Aurangzeb had cherished. Patricide or fratricide was no obstacle to him, in fact, the cruel and heartless Aurangzeb did not scruple to cast a snare in order to make away with his good brother Dara and his nephew Lali as their death would simply pave the way for him. He knew also that the Rajputs would not fight on behalf of his brothers Murad and Suja and then it would not be difficult to influence them with the grant of money or *jaigir*. He began secret preparations attempting the life of Dara and Lali. It was a thousand pities that Roshenara not only fanned the flame in this thrilling conspiracy but lent a free hand in this affair. This was an affair unprecedented in the annals of history. Surely Aurangzeb would never have secured the throne but for Roshenara's help. She was an evil genius of the Mogul empire and so was the root cause of its decline and fall.

As for Suja, he was a practical man. The idea of the Imperial throne never entered his brain. He had the high aspiration of extending the Mogul empire while in Bengal, but as soon as he had heard of Murad

and Aurangeb's action, he also advanced towards Agra. Three brothers from three different directions had been advancing aiming at the Imperial throne whereas the Rajputs were standing like iron walls in their midst.

Amongst the Mogul Aurangzeb was second to none but amongst the Rajputs there was one soul who could cope with him. In point of intelligence, craftiness and political instinct he was Aurangzeb's rival rather superior to him in some respects. If there was anybody under the sun whom Aurangzeb dreaded it was Jasobant Singh ruler of Marwar. Save and except him Aurangzeb pooh-poohed every soul.

We have come to know Jasobant's opinion already. He had tried his utmost that the cunning and insincere Aurangzeb did not sit on the throne, especially as he had a positive hatred towards the Hindus. He became very suspicious of the Mogul soldiers therefore he played a trick like the wily Aurangzeb. One day he came to see Murad in his camp in person.

An un-dreamt-of affair. He came to see Murad with only a couple of faithful warriors. The Moguls took him for a common Rajput soldier or ambassador but when they had come to know who he was, there was a great sensation all over. The same Jasobant Singh whom Aurangzeb had tried hard to get within his clutches—a fact not unknown to Murad—came to Murad's camp unsolicited. And so he was accorded the highest reception as soon as Toki Khan came to know of it and instantly a word was sent to Murad. The prince has

tened to the spot stopping his jollities . On his appearance Jasobant Singh embraced him endearingly like a brother

Murad invited Jasobant Singh to his own camp Having talked over this and that Jasobant spoke out the object of his call saying,—

“Prince ! after a deliberate consideration we come to decide that it is you who ought to sit on the Imperial throne after our emperor inasmuch as you possess all the qualifications for becoming the emperor

Elated with joy Murad replied,—

“ You say all this out of extreme affection Brother Aurangzeb holds the same opinion but I dont think so ”

Jasobant Singh laughed in his sleeve sayings,—

“ I don't say all this out of flattery. You know we hail from the hills and so are not so artful We don't understand wily words nor do we use such, Let me explain why I consider you to be the fittest person for the throne As for Dara, he is neither a Hindu nor a Muhamedan, and so he is not fit to be the emperor , in fact with his accession the Muhamedans would in all probablity stir up a rebellion I proposed for the establishment of a Hindu empire, but to that there are a thousand obstacles as it might result in family quairel amongst us , consequently the proposal of mine was set at naught As for Aurangzeb he is a *Fakir* , his case is therefore out of the question , as for Suja he has a positive hatred towards the Rajputs and so he cannot possibly secure our sympathy Considering all those

facts we have decided to elect you as our would-be emperor

Murad was about to leap with joy but he controlled himself saying —

" I'm ever indebted to you. Who does n't know that the Rajputs are the very pillars of the Imperial throne."

" But the thing is—we have all eaten the emperor's salt and so we don't wish to see a riot over the throne during his life time," replied Jasobant Singh.

Nor do we wish" was the emphatic reply

' There's another reason why a riot is not desirable now. A disturbance would lead to a terrible war. Dara would be the last person to part with the throne without bloodshed. Just as Roshenara is your help Jahanara is his help. And remember she possesses unbounded power and influence" added Jasobant Singh

Now what do you advise me at this stage? We are prepared to abide by your instructions at this critical juncture."

" Jasobant Singh said with a laugh —

Prince! Just take our advice. Let the war be postponed for the present. Let the marriage take place first of all. And then we'll take your side if a war is necessary to set you on the throne."



CHAPTER V

BETWEEN TWO CRAFTY MEN

Not having understood the mysterious words of the Rajput hero Murad looked at his face surprised saying,—

“Marwar Raj, I can’t make the head or the tail of what you mean”

“I don’t see why you can’t. It is so easy, besides, not a new thing with you” replied Jasobant Singh

The Marwar ruler who was expert in lying returned,—

“On two conditions Dara is ready to waive his claim to the throne”

“Ready to waive his claim?” ejaculated the prince with surprise.

Laughing in his sleeve the Marwar Raj returned,—

“Well just as the one is a *Fakir*, the other is a philosopher. The one wants to spend his days in the culture of religion, the other is anxious to study Hindu Philosophy with a Hindu saint. This evidently goes to show that Dara also is not anxious for the throne like Aurangzeb but looks after affairs at the pressing request of his old father.”

Both of them are greatmen and are not hankerers after worldly pleasures.

Right—ho Should you create no disturbance during the life-time of the emperor he would give you the throne with the greatest alacrity returned Jasobant Singh.

"I'm far from giving pain to my father's mind I shall be the last person to do this." replied Murad with emotions.

Dara has also sworn that he would not sit on the throne. He would like to see that you sit on the throne.

"What's the other condition ?

Jahanara must be won over Dara would not do any thing which would pain her"

Sister Jahanara does not like us. That is our misfortune."

"There's no lamenting the past. Now she must be won over" returned Jasobant Singh

"Tell me how she could. I'll followed your advice.

Jasobant Singh said laughing —

I was driving at that marriage.

Marwar Raj what are your wishes ? Speak plain, I don't understand you clearly "

You do understand to some extent. The foreseeing Aurangzeb said the same thing which I am going to tell you Jahanara loves a girl with all her heart Should you marry the girl you would be the princess

son-in-law and so all troubles would be over" returned Jasobant Singh.

"This was the advice which Aurangzeb also gave me I sent my proposal to the emperor, but instead of granting my prayer he sent troops against me and to be plain, I feel very much humiliated, Am I not worthy of winning even a bandī as my wife I don't aspire after the Imperial throne, especially I am averse to enter into any warfare during the emperor's lifetime and to thus give him pain Now all these military preparations are intended for winning the girl in question Should I not have her easily, the war must be the result" observed Murad

"Prince, you are mistaken to think that way There was no objection from any side regarding the marriage in question, on the contrary, it would have been a stroke of fortune But the day your proposal was put the night previous to that the girl disappeared mysteriously, and since then there has been no clue to her whereabouts" rejoined Jasobant Singh

"Is the emperor under the impression then 'I have kidnapped the girl?" questioned Murad

"On the girl's disappearance the princess (Jahanara) became almost frantic with grief and so your proposal was looked down upon at that time Everybody thought that you must have stolen her away and hence, so much tumult and agitation Now that the wrong impression has been removed, there would be no more objection to your proposal. She has now consented

to the marriage only to avoid bloodshed and fraternal quarrel also that it would relieve old emperor from his mental pain."

But there has been no clue to the girl's whereabouts."

"We'll talk over that later on. Your accession to the throne would give Jahanara pleasure and not pain."

'Brother Aurangzeb gave me this advice.'

He is the wisest man amongst us. It is quite natural that he would give us good advice."

I'm quite ready to marry this girl. It is only for us to secure her now"

Fortunately I have come to know her whereabouts.

"Have you? Has she returned to the Rang Mahal then?"

No, she hasn't. No body but myself knows her whereabouts. Had Dara and Jahanara got her back, they would have informed you about it with the greatest pleasure."

"Where's that girl now?"

She is at my capital in Jodhpur

Extremely surprised Murad questioned,—

"At your capital in Jodhpur?"

Jasobant Singh said laughing —

Prince, I'm the main spring of every thing—be it peace or war. Don't you find I might set you on the throne, without any trouble if I choose?"

I'm fully aware of your kindness. I'm always

prepared to act up to your advice." was the modest reply

"Then you will have to go to Jodhpur"

"In Jodhpore," exclaimed Murad in extreme surprise

"May I not have the fortune of having the dust of your sacred feet in my capital?" said Jasobant in a laugh

"What a question, what would be more delightful than to go to your capital?"

"In this a long-looked for aspiration would be fulfilled You must have heard your father (Prince) Khuram) was bedaubed with the title of Emperor Shah Jahan in Mewar"

"Yes, it is a known fact Virtually speaking, it was the Rajputs who set my father on the throne"

"Now it is Mewar's turn. It is desired that your marriage takes place in my capital and that you be proclaimed as emperor there

"I have not the least objection to this

"I have won over the emperor, Prince Dara and Princess Jahanara in fact every one.

"You are the prop and pillar of the Mogul throne, Who would not comply with your request?"

"Then surely you have no objection to your going to Jodhpore towards this sacred performance,"

"Not the least"

"Then every thing is settled Don't you delay then Just break up the camp and start for Marwar I in-

vited the emperor on this occasion but his illness stands in the way consequently Prince Dara and Princess Jahanara can't leave him behind."

Marwar Raj, how did the girl leave the Rang Mahal and go as far as Jodhpore?"

"It is a long story You will hear everything from her direct" returned Jasobant Singh.

Then he added laughing —

Only know how the girl feels extremely rejoiced that you would marry her Other things you would hear when you go to Jodhpore. I have invited' Ambar Mewar Kota, Bundi Bikanir Jatalmir and other Rajput rulers. We all start for Rajputana to-morrow So there would be no more warfare. Therefore we need n't stay here any longer The emperor has granted us permission to start."

"I also 'start to-day' was the emphatic reply

Yes, do so by all means. It is not for the wise to shilly-shally A thousand obstacles might stand in the way I wrote to Prince Aurangzeb explaining everything My ambassador has returned from him. He has given full consent to our proposal and has started for the Deccan. He is' a *Fakir* and so hates bloodshed ' returned Jasobant Singh.

"I start to-day repeated Murad.

I leave now then" rejoined Jasobant Singh

Upon this Murad stood up with the words —

'Be kind to me. It is you who would be the pillars of the Imperial throne when I become emperor"

“ Certainly”

With these words Jasobant Singh embraced the prince with affection and mounted his horse, Two of his faithful ministers present heard every thing without speaking a word Toki Khan who was also present kept silent,

The three Rajputs came far off headed by the ruler of Jodhpur Hearing a half-articulated laugh behind the Rajput ruler turned back saying,—

“ What makes you laugh, Sagar Mall ?”

“ Maharaj, I can't restrain my laugh Now I understand the crafty shrewd Aurangzeb has been rightly served He is not fit to unfasten the latches of your shoes” was the reply

“ Maharaj, be pleased to pardon me To speak the plain truth I feel ashamed at finding you telling such sheer lies” returned the other warrior

Jasobant Singh said laughing,—

“ My heroes, you must return the same compliments to the wicked as you receive from them—this is what the scriptures enjoyn It is absolutely necessary to use a tissue of lies only if you want to keep the wicked Aurangzed in subjection ”

“ There's not an atom of truth in what you have just stated before Murad Does it become of a Rajput ! returned the other warrior

“ You are too silly In politics no such thing is to be thought of, especially in dealing with a black sheep ” observed Jasobant Singh in a laugh

It is very probable that Murad has fully believed in your statement and would thus go to Jodhpore. What would you do then?" questioned Sagar Mall.

"Until Aurangzeb's fangs are not broken Murad, would have to remain confined within the Rajput fort sure as fate" replied Jasobant Singh.

CHAPTER VI.

AURANGZEB'S VICTORY.

For a long time the three Rajput heroes wended on their journey, then the Marwar Raj suddenly looked back saying,—

“Why at my back, come to my sides”

The two Rajput heroes responded at once Then the three went on riding side by side. Jasobant Singh now addressed Lakshan Singh,—

“You are a hero and are quite expert in warfare, but you know nothing about politics, therefore you feel pained at my words. But just fancy with a false hope of the throne to the foolish Murad the wicked Aurangzeb is coming no wrest in co-operation with him the throne from father and brother. There would be a dreadful bloodshed, we who are on the emperor's side are bound to defeat the wicked, but I have a great suspicion on the Mogul soldiers of the emperor”

“Is there any grave reason for such suspicion on your part, pray ?” questioned Lakshan Singh

“To speak the truth, I go so far as to suspect the old general Hossain Khan”

“Impossible He has eaten the emperor's salt for four decades and so treachery on his part is out of the question”

'It would be all right if it is so. But what on earth could be the reason which led him and Aurangzeb's spy go in secret to Roshnera's garden ?

'Really ? who told you this ?' exclaimed both of them in a surprise.

Jasobant Singh said laughingly —

'Am I not justified to engage spies ?

To this none of the warriors said anything. Jasobant Singh added —

Now should the two brothers be united they would become stronger. We ought to see, therefore, that they remain separated from each other and this is simply why I mean to send Murad to the Jodhpore fort. There he would have no discomforts.

'That is nothing short of confinement then' observed Lakshan Singh.

Jasobant Singh rejoined in a laugh —

'In a way. As long as the emperor is alive, the prince has to spend his days in Marwar.

"Maharaj You are asking for a great trouble" returned Sagar Mall

There's no help for it Sagar Mall. We have eaten the salt of the emperor whose interest we ought to see by all means.

"Certainly" was the simultaneous reply

Jasobant Singh has no other intention I warrant you" returned Marwar ruler

Then he added after a pause,—

Don't you think Lakshan Singh that I have told

Murad a tissue of lies I have told him what would take place in the future and that has already come to pass”

“Maharaj, we can't make out what you mean” observed both of them

“What I have told Murad are lies, indeed, but they would prove too true in course of time”

“We can't make out” repeated both of them

Jasobant Singh said in a laugh,—

“What botheration? A man like Aurangzeb can not be checkmated at once, therefore a few tricks must always be ready in hand”

“We can't make the head or tail of it” was the same reply.

“You surprise me! I can, however, prevent this warfare even with the marriage in question. I have reserved this trick also,

“Do you know the whereabouts of this girl?” demanded both of them

“Do you think it is a very difficult thing?”

“Even with a scrutinising search the princess has not come to know her whereabouts” returned both the warriors

“Do you think the princess is second to none?

“Not so Do you think Murad would cool down in the event of this marriage taking place? rejoined the warriors

“Very probably. He is not so anxious to become the emperor. Wine and women are all in all to him.

I dare say he would go to Jodhpore. My object is not to confine him. I want to get him married to this girl only with the object of muzzling him. Should I not succeed in my attempt his confinement ought to be resorted to. The princess should under no circumstances be allowed to enter into bloodshed while the emperor is alive.'

But every thing depends upon the recovery of the girl."

" Rest assured that the girl must be ferretted out."

With these words Jasobant Singh assumed a look which he spoke that he had known more about the girl than any body else and that he was not willing to divulge it then. They said nothing but simply followed the Marwar ruler.

Jasobant Singh, too said nothing but galloped off towards his camp in a pensive mood. Here Murad ordered his camp to be broken up but his general Toki khan hesitated. Finding him in such an attitude the prince demanded—

Now tell me what are your wishes only don't prove an obstacle to my jovialties.

Prince, Jasobant Singh should not be trusted' replied Toki khan'

Murad looked at his face with a surprise and demanded

why not?

" All the Rajputs are on Dara's side and unmical towards the Moguls. Should you go to Jodhpur now

Jasobant Singh might prove an enemy, especially Aurangzeb does not wish you to leave this place. He is coming here from the Deccan."

"But he has advised me to marry the girl?"

"I know, but Jasobant Singh cannot be trusted,"

"Could we not trust Rajput, Eh?"

"Jasobant Singh is not like the other Rajputs"

"What's your opinion, then?"

"You ought not to move an inch from here until prince Aurangzeb arrives"

"Well, that means warfare I am not for bloodshed"

"I think Jasobant Singh has given me good advice"

"Here is his ambassador. Just see what he writes"

At this juncture a horseman happened to come in breathless haste and halted.

His horse was foaming all over. It was evident from his look he must have come from a far-off place.

In a trice he dismounted. Having *kurnished* the prince with profound respects, he handed over a letter to Murad. The letter ran thus,—

"Don't trust any body. Stay where you are without moving an inch. I will join you soon,"

Aurangzeb

Toki khan observed,—

"Just see Aurangzeb endorses the same opinion as myself"

The prince remarked rather disgusted,—

I find you are going to seeing my marriage frustrated. All troubles would have been over on the performance of this marriage and I would have been the Emperor in course of time. Now I find every thing is spoilt.

CHAPTER VII

OLD FRIENDS

At the time when Jasobant Singh was busy inducing Murad to go to Jodhpore, Hingan Khan came to see Sailesh in the new house. He found Ganga Ram sitting on the verandah and enjoying a smoke. He enquired of the servant,—

“Where is Babu Sahib ?”

Gangaram spoke not a word. Hingan Khan lost his temper easily. Finding Gangaram silent he felt himself insulted. So he raised his voice enquiring,—

“Is the Babu Sahib in ?”

Gangaram looked towards him in anxiety, then having put his hands on both ears he replied in the negative.

Hingan said to himself,—

“The fellow seems to be deaf”

Then he repeated the question with a very loud voice,—

“Where is Babu Sahib ?”

Gangaram gave the same answer

Then Hingan Khan came close to Gangaram and spoke out. Again the same response.

Hingan now said,—

“The beggar has been totally deaf. The Babu is

not probably in otherwise he would surely have heard my voice. What botheration ! Let me see if the fellow has got liquor in stock."

With these words Hingan prepared to go within when Gangaram rose in a hurry and blocked his way. Finding him doing so Hingan Khan exclaimed —

"What botheration ! What does the beggar say ? But I must wait till the Babu comes back.

Don't go in please. The ladies are inside.

Ladies inside ! Where are ladies come from ?" exclaimed Hingan with surprise. Then he spoke out with a louder voice.—

"Has Babu Sahib married ? Service and marriage both at the same time !"

At this stage Pandayji spoke from behind —

"Khan Saheb ! What makes you burst out ?"

"This fellow has been totally deaf and can't hear what I say replied Hingan with disgust.

"What's the good of bursting out then ? Evidently the Babu is not in or he would have seen us your voice could be heard from the other side of the Jumna. Now let us wait for him. He will return soon returned Pandayji.

Yes I was going to wait here. The fellow does not allow us to go in saying the Zenana 'is in' returned Hingan Khan.

"Zenana ! observed Pandayji in a surprise.

Yes that's what he says."

Marriage and service go together !

"Now he is a married man, it is no wonder he has kept a Baiji (up-country woman)"

"It would be all right in that case for the jollities would go in full swing."

"The fellow is now the general of one thousand soldiers It is I who prevailed upon the princess to do it"

"We won't let him off unless we have a share"

"Well, if he does not give us a share, there are means enough, other persons would give us thousands of gold coins."

"Shut up. We must speak in a whisper

He could not hear me though I was at the top of my voice"

"I don't understand you a bit who offers gold coins"

"The princess herself. The beggar must be removed anyhow"

"And what for? You just now said she has given him a job,"

"There is the fun It is very difficult to go into the whims of the princess We shall be veritable lords if we can finish this work, but you must help me."

"But why my help?" You could finish it yourself"

"No friend, it is not for me to do that You are an expert in this You have taken it up, we will go shares"

"It is no easy task How much will they give?"

"A lac of gold coins."

Good gracious ! So much for this work ?"

Oh you fool ! Could it be so much for this idol ? He is now at the head of Lali sahib's Body guard. First we will try to win him over. If we succeed well and good otherwise he must any how be removed and when the road is clear both father and son must be removed.

Very very difficult. Shut up. Here he comes."

At this stage Sailesh Ray happened to come in. Founding him both Hingan and Pandayji salaamed him with due respect, adding

Good morning Babu sahib."

But at their sight Sailesh assumed a grave appearance. What an inauspicious moment he must have met them ! He now began to think seriously how he could get rid of these fellows and said nothing —

Yet the rogues could not go into his heart. Pandayji said laughing —

Just fancy what friendly feelings we entertain towards you. You could not have secured such a high post but for Hingan Khan's help.

Sailesh replied in a grave tone,—

I did not secure the post through Hingan interference.

Upon this Hingan assumed a peculiar expression of the face and said in a laugh —

A veritable iron age ! Very well we admit what you say. We congratulate our friend on his success in obtaining such a big post.'

"We congratulate him The more as he has brought Zenana" observed Pandayji

Sailesh Ray exclaimed with surprise,—

"Zenara!"

Hingan Khan replied in a laugh,—

"We are not going to snatch away your thing. Why do you keep us in the dark then?"

Sailesh questioned,—

"Who told you that I had got ladies in the house?"

"That deaf servant of yours!"

My deaf servant What do you mean?"

Hingan Khan replied in disgust,—

"I had to speak to him in such a high voice that it has brought a pain in the abdomen The fellow is extremely deaf"

Sailesh Ray looked at his servant's face in a surprise. He knew what stuff Ganga Ram was made of.

From his manner, Sailesh understood that Ganga Ram was making fun with these two rogues He laughed within himself, but he knew nothing as to the dreadful news he had gathered in the simulation of a deaf man In order to drive them out he only said,—

"I am very busy just now I shall have to go to the Fort immediately"

But the importunate devils would not let him off. Hingan Khan whispered into his ear

"A lac of gold coins"

Sailesh Ray said in disgust,—

"All coins you might take, I don't care."

Hingan Khan said in a horse laugh —

“What a fool you are! You are but a child
Don't for Heaven's sake, throw off good luck. A lac
of gold coins you would have. A share of your service
we might have, but I don't expect all these. Just join
us in this.

Sailesh Ray replied in a grave tone,—

Just excuse me. I don't like to be on friendly
terms with you any more.”

At this Hingan burst out laughing —what a fool!

Pandayji thundered forth —

Indeed! Now we are no body to you inasmuch
as you are a general. But don't think you can get rid
of my hands so easily. I have followed you from
that far off Benares. I have seen many a faithless per-
son but not one like you”

Sailesh Ray burst into a fit of fury. He was in-
clined to kick the fellow out of the room but it flashed
upon his mind at once he should not enter into any
quarrel with any person at this stage and so he con-
trolled himself. He was going to leave the place with-
out any word but Pandayji stood in his way. At this
Sailesh questioned —

Now what do you want?”

“A share” was the reply

“Of what” was the query

“A share of your service” was the rejoinder

“Is it you who helped me in obtaining the service?”
demanded Sailesh.

"I don't know whether we did" replied the unfortunate fellow.

Sailesh had never been in such a fix before. Now he felt he had fallen into the hands of a veritable rogue of Benares from whose clutches it was not easy to get out of. But now he was at the Head of a thousand soldiers and prince Lalı sahib was his patron—and so there was no fear on his part. He said in a grave tone,—

"I have not got a single farthing up to now. Just see me when I get something from the Durbar I will give you whatever I could and I don't want to see your cursed face any more.

Pandayji replied in a taunt,—

"This cursed face was at one time a divine face to you. Rest assured you shall not be allowed to get out of ours clutches. As for money you won't have to earn. It is we who will earn money. Whatever we tell you to do, you must listen"

Heaven knew with what a difficulty Sailesh could controll his passions. Therefore he demanded,—

"Now what are your wishes?"

"Both of us have nets in our hands. The moment these are cast, gold coins would fall into them, I warrant you" observed Pandayji

"Now unriddle your riddle. I don't understand" returned Sailesh.

"Yes-yes, rather hard to understand. You know, I

believe, Jahanara's pet daughter is missing rejoined Pandayji.

"Yes, I know But what of that ?

And the person who would ferret her out or give a clue to his whereabouts would be amply rewarded by the princess. replied Pandayji.

"Yes, I know she has promised that said Sailesh.

Supposing I give her this information. What could be my reward ?" demanded Pandayji.

I can't tell exactly what sums you would get but I am sure it must be quite a big amount.

"Do you care to have a share out of this ?"

I don't care a farthing Say where the poor girl is ?"

At first Sailesh Ray was anxious to turn out these rogues but now he felt himself quite bewildered hearing about the girl from these villains infact he could not contain himself. At this Pandayji laughed a hoarse laugh and exclaimed.

"Now you come to know us

Turning a deaf ear to the words of the villain Sailesh questioned —

"Do you really know where the girl is staying at present ?

"Pandayji is not the person to talk nonsense. remarked Pandayji.

"If you tell me where she is you will get an enormous sum of money.

“Do you think I am such a fool as to tell you that thing before payment”

“I could send the information to the princess through Lalı sahib”

“Pandayji is not the person to go to the lock up and benumbed”

“Then how will you get the money from the princess?”

“You fool! Your co-operation is needed only for that”

“My co-operation and why?”

“You must have the money first of all For Heaven's sake, don't give out my name As soon as the money comes to you, I will give the looked-for information,—now this is one business, and Hingan Khan also has another business in hand

Hingan Khan spoke something into Sailesh's ears in a whisper on hearing this Sailesh started up and was about to kick him out But then and there he recalled Protiva in his memory thinking to himself she had fallen into the hands of these scoundrels Consequently he could not provoke these fellows under any circumstances as the poor girl was all in all to him He controlled himself with a difficulty Pandayji said laughing,—

“So you see, brother, the ties of our friendship are never to be snapped Just consider the matter seriously. To-morrow we call again

CHAPTER VIII

A SERIOUS DIFFICULTY

Pandayji left the place laughing and dragging Hingan by the hand while Sailesh kept standing there like a wooden statue. He shuddered and became extremely anxious for Protiva as he feared Protiva's ruin would be complete if she had fallen into the hands of these wicked persons. But there was one thing—their object was to have money from the princess which was all in all to them under these circumstances they would take particular care of her. The dreadful thing he had heard from Hingan—that even he forgot when he thought of Protiva. Infact he had never fallen into such a difficulty before.

Sailesh was quite at a loss to think what he should do now. If he should tell Lali Sahib about it surely Lali Sahib would cause Pandayji's arrest and Pandayji who was up to all sorts of lies would deny every thing. Then in that case Sailesh would fall into a false position and so would fall into danger. And at the same time there was a chance of a serious danger to Sailesh if he would believe these men. Should there be a trouble at the very beginning of his service the path of his future advancement would be blocked for good and all.

While on the other hand he could not allow Protiva to be in the custody of these men even for a single day. Therefore he was quite puzzled as to his future proceedings. Why was he fated to have fallen into the hands of these rogues?

All this time Ganga Ram was seated leaving his hookah aside. Now he stepped towards his master, saying,—

“Please come in Sir”

At this Sailesh followed him in. The old servant was careful enough to shut the door from within and observed in a low tone—

“Don’t you allow these two rogues here any more. Don’t speak to them at all”

Sailesh too, had not the slightest desire to remain in touch with those rogues, but he had fallen into a great fix and so could not ascertain what to do

He questioned,—

“Why do you so say, Gangaram?”

Gangaram said in a more subdued tone,—

“The rascals think that they are extremely cunning. They spoke many secrets amongst themselves thinking I had lost the power of hearing”

“What secrets you mean?”

“Soul-stirring secrets. Some body has promised them a large sum of money only if they could finish you”

With the greatest surprise Sailesh exclaimed,—

“Me?”

"Yes, you and none but you this I have heard quite distinctly" was the reply

'What could be their motive ?'

'That I can't say. But they were consulting on that matter'

Sailesh could not determine whether he should tell Gangaram what he had heard from these ruffians. In order to console Gangaram Sailesh added.—

'Don't be afraid Gangaram I will be very cautious and careful.'

The *badmashas* could do you little harm so long as I'm here but I can't be with you always' returned Gangaram

No fear I will always be on the alert." repeated Sailesh.

Hearing the noise caused by the horse's hoofs at this time Sailesh rushed in a hurry and found a couple of horse men at his door. In warrior's dress they were just dismounting. It did not take Sailesh long to make out one of them but the other person he could not was a young person with Persian dress on.

Finding Prince Lalji at his house at this unusual hour Sailesh was quite surprised and thought that the prince must have called here on some urgent business. Sailesh advanced up and made his profound *Salaams* to the prince, at this the prince observed in a laugh —

Remember that in the court I'm prince and you my general otherwise we are friends.

"Prince, you are showing me undue favour I would

have run and called on you in person if you had sent me a word to that effect." replied Sailesh

"I have comé in person inasmuch as it is an urgent business Could you make this person out?" returned the prince

Having turned his look towards the other person Sailesh shook his head saying he did not. Then he said in a soft tone,—

"I don't remember to have seen this face before"

Lalı Sahıb burst into laugh saying,—

"Better that you don't Now let me tell you my business Let's go inside"

Then he looked all around adding,—

"Is there any one else in the house?"

"None but my old servant."

"Let's go in at once I have got something very serious to tell you Just tell your servant to remain outside and keep a strict eye all around"

At once Sailesh called his servant in and told him Lalı Sahıb's wishes Ganga Ram concealed his *hookka* behind and went out and then Sailesh went in with the new comers

Inside there was a milk white bedding The prince sat down and asked his companion to sit down also. None of them put off their shoes, at this Sailesh questioned,—

"Make yourselves comfortable, please"

Lalı Sahıb said in a laugh,—

"My general, we are not in safety even here, We

have always to be in arms, we might be attacked by enemies even at this place.

Sailesh questioned in extreme surprise,—

“Could you ?”

Our lives are not in safety even for a single moment. The Mogul princes are always ready to meet death. There was a day I escaped the very jaws of death. Therefore we ought to be cautious in the future. Now let me tell you my business. Just start for Jodhpore at once.”

Sailesh demanded in a surprise,—

“For Jodhpore ! What for ? What business there ? Should I not stay with the prince at this stage ?”

“There are many persons with me here so there is no chance of any fear owing to your absence, especially the business on which I mean to send you there could not be placed in any other hands. returned Lali Sahib.

Needless to add I will try my utmost to finish the work I should be entrusted with” rejoined Sailesh.

It is known through a spy that Maharaja Jasobant Singh of Jodhpur called at Murad's camp and told him that Gul had been in his custody at Jodhpore also that he would be allowed to marry Gul only if he goes there.” Said Lali Sahib.

“Really ?” exclaimed Sailesh in a choked voice.

Yes, such is the report. Can't say whether true or false, nor can it be said how Gul went from Agra to

Jodhpore so suddenly We have heard also that Jasobant Singh is making arrangements for Murad's confinement in the fort as soon as he arrives there , I want you to go there just to ascertain the real fact ”

“Prince, you should also be furnished with what I have come to know sometime ago in this connection ” observed Sailesh

Saying this Sailesh told Lalji all he had heard from Pandayji about Protiva On hearing this Lalji became grave He said,—

“I heard about this man from you long ago. He cannot be trusted, but this is a serious thing. Perhaps he has come to know that Gul is in Jodhpore ”

“My conviction is Gul has not been so far away but has been kept in confinement somewhere here. Had she been in Maharaja's hands, he would not have kept her in secret in this fashion ”

“A great puzzle indeed ! And whether you ought to leave this place now is a subject of deep consideration The wretched rascal must have come to know something about her whereabouts or he would not have opened this question Now if he is brought under arrest here, he would deny everything ” remarked Lalji.

“He has already said he would.” returned Sailesh.

“Consequently he must be pumped out and that would be difficult also if you won't remain here It is not safe on your part to go alone.” rejoined Lalji

“Prince, I don't care for my life even But I must tell you what I have heard in this connection also ”

Saileshe now related to the prince all he had heard from Ganga Ram on hearing this the prince said in a sad tone,—

“Alas ! these that sympathise with us in our distress—their lives are not in safety even for a single day

Saileshe replied in an emotion —

Prince, I don't care two pence for my life. I will consider myself most fortunate if I can lay down my life for your sake.

Lali Sahib observed —

“My intention was that you should start for Gul's search immediately But now I find that I must consult our respected princess Jahanara and esteemed *Sashayarsi* on this subject.

The soul-stirring thing Hingan Khan spoke to his ear that thing Saileshe told Lali Sahib in full On hearing this Lali Sahib started up and ejaculated —

“No no it is all bosh. She (Roshenara) might love Aurangzeb more than any other body but she is not so wicked It must be admitted however Aurangzeb is up to anything , infact it is due to him and his plots that we are all so very afraid but she is not so cruel-hearted as Aurangzeb.

A mere boy Lali Sahib was, so he became extremely agitated. He said —

You just come to the fort. We must do whatever would be thought to be the best. We need not come together Another thing you must not mix with any

body and every body The greater you would remain as a stranger the greater would be the good. We don't know who are our friends and who enemies, nor is there any means of knowing that ”

Saying all this Lali Sahib rose. His companion was all this time sitting by him like a marble statue. Now that person rose and followed him like shadow ; that person was silent all along Looking at that person with a surprising eye Sailesh said to himself,—

“Who could it be, a new person, but it seems to be a known face but where I have seen this face, I can't recollect ”

The prince now mounted his horse, so also his companion Then Lali Sahib addressed Sailesh,—

“Don't be late”

Then the prince asked his companion to ride side by side

At this the companion replied,—

“Prince ! my place is behlnd you Should any body fire a shot or throw an arrow I will meet it.”

Sailesh could over hear this He said to himself again,—

“Who could it be ?”

CHAPTER IX.

IN FRONT OF THE TAJ

The prince ran his horse. It was mid-day then. There was a furnace heat all around. Who ever has seen the heat of Agra knows it too well that it was beyond comparison. There was no human being on the way only a few *Ekkas* were plying at times. Preparations for war were going on all sides. The cavalry were moving to and fro so all of them took no notice of the prince and his comrade. Those that could make him out gave him a salute. But the prince regardless of his surroundings rode on with his companion.

Instead of proceeding towards the fort the prince took another path. At this his companion enquired.—

“Won’t you go to the fort, pray?”

“My mind is not at rest and I mean to go to the Taj” replied the prince.

“Now? No danger there?”

“No fear at day time. You are with me.”

Both of them became silent. The prince came up before the Taj gate. Finding him there the guards stepped up in a hurry and held the horse’s head. He got down from the horse and both of them entered the garden.

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They went on in silence for a good distance.—Then having got to the marble seat where he was about to lose his life he addressed his comrade,—

“Do you remember?”

“Prince I beseech you to forget about this”

The prince spoke not a word. He came up to the bank of the Jumna where there was a beautiful bower. There he got in and said to his companion,—

“Come on, Moti, let's sit down here a delightfully cool place,”

Motiya who was garbed as a male person replied—

“Prince, instead of having rest in the *Shish-mahal* you are wandering about into this heat Your face has already been reddened with the sun”

“Your face has also been reddened and you look more handsome now” said the prince in a laugh,

“Your honour loves this slave, this is enough for her”

“I have brought you here only to tell you something in private”

“The slave is at your service, please command”

“I feel extremely happy with your peerless love, you know it too well, but I have a duty to perform”

“Order and the slave will carry it out even at the risk of her life. She craves for nothing more than your love”

“And yet I have a duty. I ought to marry you along, I have decided to tell father and Grand father about it to-day”

Prince pardon this impertinence I m but a common slave girl Both the emperor and your father won t consent to this marriage owing to some political reasons They would marry you to some princess Muhamedan or Rajput such an alliance is imperative only to keep the empire intact You would become the emperor in the future."

'Heaven knows whether I would become the emperor"

As for me, I also can t give you my consent There has already been a serious dispute over the throne between your father and uncles, it is necessary under the circumstances for you to keep the powerful Rajput chiefs and *Omraos* in your hands and so you ought to enter into matrimonial alliance with them.

'Should I marry at all it must be you and nobody else under the sun."

'This slave does not aspire to be come your *Begum* I would consider myself most fortunate if I could serve at your feet as a common *daudi*."

'Far from it you are an idol'

Saying this the prince drew her to his bosom and gave her repeated kisses.

Through emotion Motiya closed her eyes and then said in a laugh --

Prince you give kisses to a male person what would people think of it?"

I don t care a straw for people's remarks" was the emotional reply"

"Prince will you just comply with a slight request of mine?"

The prince replied rather amused

"No, I won't"

"Swear then that you won't make this marriage proposal again until this fraternal quarrel comes to an end. If you do, your enemies would take advantage and cause greater disturbance"

"Moti, you are intelligent I find you are right"

"I will be the last person to do anything which would be detrimental to your interest or to the Mogul empire I'm a common bandi and mean to remain so I will serve those who would be your begums, I know only you and nothing else not do I want anything but you"

"A veritable idol you are"

Saying this the prince rose to his feet and exclaimed,—

Come—come on, Moti, I feel a desire to visit the tomb of Begam Mumtaj mahal."

Motiya rose at once and then they proceeded towards the Taj

The Taj-worlds greatest wonder—was shining like a huge pearl through the sun's rays Infacts it baffled all description

Silence reigned every where and this silence simply increased the beauty of the Taj a hundred-fold.

On stepping up to the door both of them put off their shoes Finding the prince there. The Moulvis

cleared the way with profound respects to the prince the emperor's beloved Grandson commanded esteem everywhere.

' I feel a keen desire to offer my prayer before my Grand mother's tomb and so I am here. I want solitude. Will you just move away ?'

The Moulvis said to themselves —

"This is what is called the Imperial whim."

At the prince's bidding all of them left the place and went towards the garden. Now the prince caught hold of Moti's hands and entered the Taj.

The tomb was within a cave—a beautiful chamber. A large chandelier was hanging from above a hundred candles were burning perfuming the place with divine fragrance. The whole place was filled with the perfume of incense and flowers. The very entrance into the place removed away all the impurities of the mind and filled the heart with divine thoughts. Shah Jahan's peerless love for his beloved wife is reflected upon one's eyes in a living manner. Perhaps there is no such place under the sun.

The whole room was lighted with candles. The tomb was made of marble of exquisite workmanship and decorated with various flowers. The big diamond on the top of the tomb was glittering. This was the diamond which the emperor's beloved wife used to wear on the crown but now Shah Jahan had placed it on the tomb but unfortunately that diamond is no more there.

Lalisahib and Motiya kept standing there astonished for a while.

Both these hearts were filled with wonder. Motiya's heart began to heave up with emotion. She could not account for the reason why the prince brought her here at this unusual hour could she love him with a peerless love? Every thing seemed dark to her while within this silent and solitary tomb It seemed to her that she was sinking. not knowing where

All on a sudden she came to her senses she looked around in a fright. Now the prince held her by the hand and asked her to sit on her knees. It seemed his voice went deep into the inmost recesses of her heart She sat down. The prince, too, sat on his knees beside her.

Then the prince asked her to touch his grand mother's tomb, she did not know what she was doing ; She was only following his instructions like a marionette

Having touched the tomb with reverence the prince said in all seriousness.

"Just repeat what I utter"

Now he placed his left hand on her back saying,—

"Both of us are in the same boat whether alive or dead We swear to it touching our Grand mother's tomb We are married before her to-day and no body under the sun can snap this marriage tie

The prince asked Motiya to swear all this

Like a marionette Motiya swore with the prince not knowing what she was saying or doing

The prince now asked her to rise.

Moti rose. Her heart was filled with an ineffable emotion. Having placed her hand on the prince's shoulders she burst out crying. She tried to check it but she could not. She said in a choked voice—

Prince what have you done ?

The prince on his part raised her head with both hands and showered kisses upon her cherry lips.

The prince wiped off her face when Motiya became a little composed adding,—

"Another business I mean, Gul's Marriage. Gul whom I love from the core of my heart has given her heart to Sailesh Ray. It is for her sake that I have given this Bengali gentleman a post in the Darbar and so I have kept him in my custody—him I will marry to Gul and then my desires will have their fulfilment."

Moti replied in an anxious tone—

My lord don't you say so. You have many duties to perform you would becomethe second Akbar

Having heaved a deep sigh the prince said —

'Come on Moti

Without saying a word Moti simply accompanied the prince. She had no knowledge of her doings. She only felt that she was sinking within a sea of extreme happiness.

The prince came out and addressed the Moulvis while putting on his shoes,—

I'm sending money just now with which you must feed one thousand dervishes and beggers in the name of my revered Grand mother to-night ”

Finding that was the season for their making a good harvest the Moulvis gave their respected salaams.

The prince stepped up to the gate and mounted his horse and then both he and his beloved Moti made for the fort Every one got surprised at finding the prince into the high way during this heat But every thing was possible now as it was an open secret that during the emperor's life time three of his sons aspired after the throne and so were proceeding towards Agra. They would care in the least for heat or rain at this stage.

CHAPTER X

HINGAN KHAN'S HOUSE.

Hingan Khan had no family. As for patrimony he had only a dilapidated house which he had kept furnished with the various articles of olden times after the imperial style. There were within the almirah different kinds of otto with the scent of rose water all around the room. There was also an Indian hubble-bubble the snake of which had become blackened through age.

There was both on the front and back a thing which might be called a garden. A few fowls were grazing here and there, consequently Hingan's house was not so neat and clean.

Hingan had a servant by name Kasem Ali who was his all-in-all. It was this man who worked both a cook and servant not only so but also he was Hingan's companion counsellor and minister as well.

Hingan was styled as *Khan Sahib* in the Darbar list. There were many other's like him they had to do no work in the Darbar but only to present themselves for which they were granted a little monthly stipend. With this small allowance Hingan could live quite comfortably. Every body would get a few ashrafis (gold coins) if he were to walk round the Darbar and so it fell to the lot of Hingan also.

Seated on a rotten wooden chair just before his house this evening Hingan was enjoying a smoke when a Mahamedan youth came up before his door, enquiring,

“Does Khan Sahib live here?”

“There are numberless Khan Sahibs here, which Khan Sahib you mean?” demanded Hingan

“Hingan Khan, Darbar Courtier I’m looking for, is this his house?” stepped up the youth with the words

“Yes, he I am” was the grave reply

Unsolicited the youth got up into the veranda saying,—

“I have a word for your private ear, let’s go in”

Hingan Khan was not a man of sober habits and so was rather dilatory in his habits. He rose in disgust and having pointed to the half-clean half-torn sheet, spread on the floor asked the new comer to sit down

As requested the youth sat down Hingan now asked his servant to get smoke ready

“Could we talk here in private?” was the query.

“Certainly There is no body here except my servant, but he is hard of hearing, you must know” replied Hingan

The youth laughed a little He said, “well and good I want to speak to you something in private”

“Very well, but I don’t know you observed Hingan

Never mind. Let me give you my own introduction. I'm a Persian Fazul Khan by name I have come to this country only of late" returned the new comer"

What for—with what object.

Only to make money I heard at home that one could make himself rich through Dehli Darbar if he could show his abilities.'

With a sad laugh Hingan replied —

Not true in all cases

The youth said in a laugh —

The person must possess abilities.

Now say your say without further preamble.

Let me ask you first whether you are my friend or enemy?

I would also ask you that very question"

"Listen then. On my way here I saw prince Murad at his Camp. Being pleased with me he has taken me in his service."

Well what then?"

"Now I have come here as a spy under him.

"Where's the proof?"

"The proof is you are one of our men.

"How do you know?"

"It is the prince himself who has told me so he spoke very highly of you—So much so that he would sit on the throne, if at all through your co-operation. This was his notion. He further added that he would make you his prime minister when he would become emperor'

At this Hingan Khan gave a laugh of joy. He returned,—

“The prince shows me some amount of favour

“Now you are convinced that I'm one of your party.”

“Not fully”

“Should I give you some secret information you would surely believe me. Now during all this disturbance the prince cannot possibly write any letters to any one here, otherwise he would have done so. In fact he was going to do so, but Taki Khan prevented him, doing so”

“A veritable dunce—he knows nothing.”

“The other day you saw princess Roshenara in the garden”

“There is nothing new in this. The princess is rather kind to me”

“She has requested you for some thing, she has promised you a large sum of money if you could accomplish this. Isn't it so ?”

This took Hingan by surprise. How could this stranger come to know of their secret counsel ? Finding Hingan mute the youth whispered something into his ear, at which Hingan Khan started up. The youth now said

“Are you not convinced now ? The princess informed Murad about it and I heard it from him. Don't you still believe me ?”

Finding himself quite at a loss what to reply Hingan kept silent. The youth added,—

I "Khan Sahib Murad wants me to act in co-operation with you hence I have been here, and here I have done something already "

'What have you done ?'

I have done what others could not have done—I mean have won over prince Lali Sahib and have been appointed his body-guard His life is within my clutches."

"Yes, I have heard of one Persian youth your appointment here has been the talk here."

What was their interest in such a talk ?

People say various gossips when they find something new What wonder is there that people would say so when they find a stranger appointed in such a responsible post."

'Khan Sahib do you think such a responsible work could be entrusted to any body and every body , therefore I told you already that ability must be shown and it is ability alone which could make one rich Murad has promised to give me a subadarship when he becomes *Badshah*.

I shall be content only if I become prime minister I am averse to going from place to place."

'There is no doubt that you would become prime minister The thing is I can't make an interview with the prince privately or openly as there are spies all around your case is quite different. If it comes to light that I have seen the princess everything will be spoilt. Don't you think so ?'

"Yes, you are right the princess has been kind to me always "

"Therefore I told you already that your case was quite different.

Now Lalı Sahib, why Lalı Sahib alone Dara and the emperor also—the lives of all these personages are entirely in my hands but the difficulty is I can't go and see the princess personally, therefore you have to do something The princess wants their assasination and she would write to us what sum she would offer for this diabolical deed, then I could go shares with you "

"I would really go shares with you when I get the primeministership, but in this I have a co-sharer"

The youth ejaculated with cxtreme surprise,—

"A co-sharer ! How is that ?"

"Can't be communicated to a third person ? is the princess aware of it ?"

Hingan Khan said•hesitateingly,—

"No she has no business to know it. To be plain, I care for w's only I mean wine and woman, but I'm not up to murders and I can't resist the temptation of money nor can I incur the princess' displeasure, it is for the above reasons that I have taken a co-sharer. He his very expert in such a thing "

"Who is that person ? can he be trusted ?"

"Fully , rest assured he could be. He hails from Benares and is a veritable hooligan who has committed several murders already.. He it was under whose kindness Lalı Sahib was all but finished, infact he would

have been finished but for the timely interference of another person who happened to come in the nick of time but he is watching every opportunity for it."

I find he is much too clever I hope the prince could not detect him at the time."

Far from it.'

'Who happened to come in?'

"My friend he had no time to see the person. He would have been caught if he had not taken to flight."

The youth laughed within himself. But that laugh was reflected on his fair face. Fortunately Hingan took no notice of it. Suppressing his laughter within himself the new comer observed in a grave tone,—

'When you say he could be fully trusted, I have to say nothing to it. Well and good I have not set my hand to the work of an assassin. That must be done through your man'

'Well in that he is exceedingly clever'

I will help you in his act and he won't have to suffer any inconvenience on that score, but a letter from the princess must be secured."

'As for that I will try my utmost.'

The work is a serious one. Princesses work by whims. Unless we secure a letter of authority decapitation would be our 'fate'

"Right ho without an authority we should not take up such a work."

"Prince Murad knows your abilities. Whatever you

would say now befits that of a minister. Now where can this co-sharer be found?"

"He is due here now."

"Then I had better wait here, mean while better to send for some liquor."

Hingan was open-handed to-day. How he would secure some liquor at this hour of the night engrossed his sole attention and so he was rather in a fix. But soon the youth got him out of the difficulty by handing over a gold coin with the words,—

"Just call your servant and ask him to bring two bottles of liquor as well as some fruits,"

With great enthusiasm Hingan shouted out.—

"Kasemali, Kasemali."

"When the servant came, he ordered for four bottles of liquor, some delicious fruits, perfumery and above all a young and handsome Baiji (an up country)

CHAPTER XI

DIAMOND CUTS DIAMOND

The youth said in a laugh,—

‘Then there will be a big nautch at Khan Sahib's place here.’

‘We cannot remain without any amusement when we have got a friend like you’ replied Khan Sahib.

Finding Kasemali waiting in the room yet Hingan thundered forth,—

‘Why do you stand like a fool? Go and carry out my orders at once, you would get a handsome *batra*’

Running his finger through the hair Kasemali replied —

‘How can we have a good Balji for such a small sum?’

The youth said in a laugh —

‘No fear I will pay whatever would be necessary’

With his eyes closed Hingan exclaimed,—

‘A first class Balji she must be’

No sooner had Kasemali left the place when Pandayji made his appearance. He was somewhat surprised at finding a stranger within the room. He kept on looking at the youth with stern eyes. He was not a drunkard or a dunce like Hingan.

Hingan Khan exclaimed,—

“Come in, Panday Sahib. A friend, a friend we have secured to-day. Sit down and make merry. There will be a *nautch* here. Kasemali has gone for wine and woman.”

At this Pandayji sat down in front of the youth and began to stare at him, then he questioned,—

“Who is he, please ?”

Hingan forgot the youth’s name but he said,—

He is the son of a rich man in Persia. From to-day we are mutual friends.

Without heeding Hingan’s words Pandayji addressed the youth,—

“May I ask your name ?”

“My name is Fazul Khan”

“How long have you been here !”

“Quite recently. I hail from Persia”

In order to get rid volleys of questions from Pandayji the youth added,—

“I have told Hingan Khan everything concerning me.”

Hingan Khan burst forth,—

“Yes, yes, I have heard everything. Let the two w’s in first, you will hear everything from me.”

At this Pandayji gave a frown. He was still then casting his sternest eyes at the youth. Then suddenly he rose saying,—

“Khan Sahib, you just make yourselves merry. I have an urgent business to attend to”

The youth intervened —

"I have got to ask you one thing"

"Pandayji sat down and saying —

"Yes, you. I have been appointed Lali Sahib's body-guard. As for other things regarding me, you will hear from Khan Sahib in detail. Lali Sahib has been informed that you know where Jahanara's foster daughter has been kept concealed. He has also come to know that you and Khan Sahib are great friends. This is one of the reasons why I have been here."

Pandayji frowned. He replied —

"Whatever Lali Sahib has heard is all a lie. I know nothing."

The youth said in a laugh —

You misunderstand me, you will hear from Khan Sahib I am one of your own."

"There is no reason why you should disbelieve me."

Pandayji replied —

It is not the question of belief or disbelief. What I mean to say is that Lali Sahib has been misinformed. In fact I know nothing."

"You fool come here. I wish to speak to you" exclaimed Hingan.

We could rather expect a vast sum of money if we could give this information to prince Lali Sahib" remarked the youth.

Hingan Khan caught Pandayji by the hand and dragged him into another room.

About half an hour passed away and yet they did not return. It was quite dark then. The room would have been very dark if the doors and windows were not kept open till then. Kasemali did not return yet and so the light was not brought into the room. Finding it inconvenient to stay alone in darkness the youth came into the Verandah.

There were rows of houses all around. On either side of the road the shop-keepers were just lighting their lamps. The smell of incense spread all over all Agra became cool with the evening breeze. Most people seated on their *charpois* on road side were having chit-chats.

Having come to the verandah the youth looked around. Only a few persons were passing the main road. Hingan lived far way from the *basar*, therefore this was rather a solitary place, only the middle-class Mahamedans used to live here. They never mixed with any troublesome affair.

Having spied all around again the youth was just going towards the road, but for reasons known to him alone he looked behind, then he began to whistle in an absence of mind. As soon as he stopped whistling, some body whistled out exactly like him. As soon as that whistle stopped, the youth gave the same sound. At this junctnre Pandayji and Hingan Khan both came instantaneously the youth became silent.

"It is rather difficult to win over Pandayji as he is so idiotic. Don't mind any thing please. You had to

"Wait here long. The beggar has not come with the liquor yet" observed Hingan with a laugh.

"You both were busy in consultation so how could I sit alone in the room? It is therefore, I went to the verandah walking to and fro" said the youth in a laugh.

"How nice you were whistling" observed Pandayji.

"This habit I have acquired from my child hood" was the reply.

"Some other body was also whistling with you" returned Pandayji.

"No not to my knowledge."

"You were quite absent-minded" taunted Pandayji. With these words he addressed Khan Sahib.

"You just wait here. I will be back presently."

"Don't you run away. You would be the loser then" remarked Hingan.

Without heeding Hingan's words Pandayji ran towards the road. Hingan observed —

"These infidels will be long to learn manners"

At this time Kasmall came in with liquor and said that the Balji would be forth coming.

Hingan was not so anxious for woman. Having taken a cup from Kasmall he entered the room and took a few more cups. This went on darkness. When the light was brought he requested the youth to take a cup.

In a few minutes Pandayji returned. He sat quite close to the youth who tried to move away but Panday took him by the hand saying —

"I have heard every thing from Khan Sahib , from to-day you are a bosom friends of ours Sit close with you."

Drinking went on in full swing. Hingan was almost under the table , as for the youth, though he had hardly taken any drink, he pretended to be fully drunk. It was Panday only who was quite grave, he served others with drink. As the Baiji had not appeared yet Hingan abused his servant very much ordering him to bring the woman as soon as possible

As sooner the servant went out Hingan began singing like an ass at which the youth could hardly restrain his laugh. Pandayji tried to stop him, but that simply excited the old man to singing louder.

When Hingan stopped both he and Panday began to press the youth to sing But the youth said he did not know how to sing but he was hard pressed and so he was in a great fix, at last this request would lead a regular fight. But the youth's object was not to enter into fight. So he was compelled to sing though in a low tone. The sweet voice made the place sweeter—infact it was so very sweet that even the most distinguished dancing girl of Agra did not possess a voice like this

"Is there any one under the sun who could throw dust into my eyes ? I now see you are a woman. You are a spy of the enemy and have come here garbed as a male person." ejaculated Pandayji

In the light the sharp sword glittered and along with , the youth leapt and put on the light and it was all

dark. What happened then could not be described. First a whistle then a bugle which was followed by the appearance of several swarthy-looking men.

For a moment only a half-articulated dreadful voice rose within the room.

Then it became all still and silent.

About half an hour later Kasemali returned with the woman in question. But finding the room dark he felt quite surprised. He shouted for his master but hearing no response he lighted the lamp but he sank within himself when the dreadful sight fell before him.

The sheet on the floor became quite torn whereas the fellows became converted into a mass.

All the bottles were broken. A side of the room became flooded with liquor. Nor was this all. In certain places blood was trickling down. It had not coagulated yet. It was evident that there took place within the room a big scuffle. In certain places torn clothes and turbans were lying about.

Kasemali looked bewildered. The Baiji felt surprised nay amazed. She only remarked with a choked voice—

"Eh ! What is this ! Where is the Khan Sahib ?

This I know nothing. They were enjoying themselves here while I went out calling you."

There must have been a great catastrophe here.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE WAY TO FATEYABAD.

Jasobanta Singh tried hard to send off Murad to Jodhpur, but he failed, whereas Aurangzeb gained his point. Instead of going to Jodhpur Murad proceeded, towards Agra, so also Aurangzeb. They kept their motive no longer a secret but advanced on their journey in order to wrest the throne from Shah Jahan and Dara openly. And Roshenara on their part, used to write to Aurangzeb regularly about what had transpired within Agra. Now there was an open enmity within the Imperial Court.

The emperor had come to know about it, but he had been quite callous. Though Jahanara brought the news to his notice, he only replied,—

“ His will be done.”

Now Dara could not bring Roshenara under control though he knew full well that she was their dead enemy. The princess was extremely cunning. Whatever she was doing was all in private and so there was no means of defeating her, especially as powerful and influential Omraos were on her side—so much so that even the commander-in-chief Hossain Khan had espoused her cause; under these circumstances Dara could not possibly make Roshenara a captive and send her to

exile unless and until she would be found guilty of treason. Should he try to do her any harm his Omraos and officers would prove his enemies, So it was not proper on his part to increase the number of his enemies. There was no doubt that Dara had fallen into a great difficulty Roshenara though his sister was working out his ruin and nobody could cope with her. Virtually there was a regular fight of wit between the two parties.

It was not advisable to allow Aurangzeb and Murad to proceed any further and so having consulted with the Rajput chiefs Dara decided to send his troops just to obstruct their path. Jasobanta Singh advanced headed mostly by Rajputs whereas Hossain Khan took Mogul soldiers only. Both the parties pitched their camps on the Fateyabad plain.

The Maharaja of Kota and other Rajput rulers addressed Jasobanta Singh—

“ Maharaja, the two princess have not joined yet. We must not allow them to meet as that would simply entrance their power. Instead of pitching our camps here we had better fall upon Murad and thus defeat him and then it would not be difficult for us to defeat Aurangzeb also.”

The arrogant Jasobant Singh said with the words,—

“ I look upon these two fellows more insignificant than ants. Must I fight separate battles with these two? For shame! Let both of them come together and I finish them in no time.”

Nobody could contradict Jasobant Singh, only they waited the contending princess on the Fateyabad plain. Such a loyalty was rather unprecedented in order to keep Shah Jahan's throne intact all the Rajput rulers were at one with one another and was ready to fight against the rebel sons of the emperor

But Jasobant Singh's pride was a death blow to Shahjahan's cause

Aurangzeb looked upon tact and politics more important than actual warfare. Instead of advancing to fight Aurangzeb tried to win over Mogul and Rajput soldiers under Shah Jahan to his own side. But Rajput soldiers were two strong-minded to be led away, not one of them even forsook the emperor or Dara

At this Aurangzeb tried his utmost to influence the Mogul soldiers gathered on the Fateyabad plain and tried to win them over by various persuasions. Many false rumours were spread in the form of forged letters. The result was the Mogul soldiers began to grow suspicious and envious of the Rajputs and so the Imperial soldiers became quite dispersed

Hussain Khan, Dara's commander-in-chief, had sold himself heart and soul to Roshenara already. He did not scruple in the least to prove a traitor though he had eaten the emperor's salt so long. He had begun to hold private correspondence with Aurangzeb of which the Rajputs did not get the scent. Jasobant Singh did not move an inch, with thirty thousand Rajput soldiers he lay encamped on the banks of the Narbada.

Aurangzeb, on his part scattered the seeds of treachery amongst the Moguls and joined his brother Murad. True he had numberless Mogul soldiers under him but he had the dress of a common *dervish* with beads of rosary in his hands and name of *Allah* in his lips. Having embraced his brother with feelings of affection he accosted him as emperor saying —

'Brother should I not have considered you fit for the throne I should have been the last person to meddle in such a dreadful affair, I find that we have to face the Rajput soldiers with the greatest difficulty

"Brother had you not tried for me I could not have dreamt of becoming the emperor to be plain, I was not so anxious for the Imperial throne.'

Aurangzeb replied in a grave tone,—

"Duty, brother calls of duty Should you not be the emperor both Islam religion and Mogul empire would be extinct during father's absence. Therefore you must needs sit on the throne. Duty should be given the first consideration. Just fancy I thought of going to Mecca, but duty orders me otherwise just to render you help.

"Thanks to your attempts that I am now the emperor but you have to do something more'

Please tell me. I am all attention.'

'Through your advice I consented to marry a bandit girl, but my father insulted me,—at the instance of Dara and Jahanara. Now that girl I want to make my own.'

"Certainly 'Who could dare poking his nose into your affairs when you are the emperor, but I hear the girl in question has disappeared'"

"No she is in Jasobant Singh's custody, He promised to give that girl on two conditions."

"Two conditions! what two conditions you mean!"

"First, I must not aim at the throne during father's life time, secondly, I must go to Jodhpur and marry the girl there."

Aurangzeb gave a smile, but said nothing. Murad replied,—

"I have never acted against your advice and therefore did not go to Jodhpore"

"You did well in not having gone to Jodhpore. You would have been made a captive," was the reply.

"Made a captive! Jasobant Singh would never have been so audacious" was the emotional reply.

"There's no action under the sun which Jasobant Singh is not up to! You won't find a second man so cunning, artful and shrewd. You don't know he is dead against the Mahamedan race in general, but I am too well aware of it"

"He must be an extremely bad man"

"No question as to that, but he has unbounded power and influence and so he would create great disturbance unless he is kept under control"

What should we do under the circumstances?"

"We must go to Fateyabad and fall upon the Tim-

No wonder that the Rajputs would get puzzled at this treacherous action on the part of the Mogul. Jasobant Singh thundered forth,—

"We are thirty thousand in number, we have no cause of fear at the hands these faithless persons. Let us, brothers, show in the field the difference between the Hindus and the Musalmans. With great enthusiasm the Rajputs fell upon the Moguls. That dreadful battle could better be imagined than described. The Mogul empire was in a tottering condition. The Mogul was trying to drive out the idol of the empire while the Hindu was causing his blood flow like the stream of the river only to keep that very idol intact. The Hindu was fighting with the Mogul for the empire, for the throne, and also for the Mogul idol, infact there was not a single Mahamedan warrior on the side of the Hindus.

It was simply beyond the power of pen to describe the bravery displayed by the Rajputs in this terrific battle. Todd's Rajasthan says in regard to this battle—

"Mounted on his mettlesome horse "Mahabub" Jasobant Singh chased the two princes with a spear in hand with the result that ten thousand Mahamedans fell on the ground for good and all whereas seventeen hundred Rajput heroes had the same fate, besides not a few Rajput soldiers of different sects were killed in the action with numberless Mogul troops. As for Murad and Aurangzeb, they were not destined to be finished yet. The Mahabub, too, was tinged with blood

oozing out from Jasobant's body who looked like a lion mising its victim. At this terrific sight the heart of the Mahamedan began to beat very heavily

The ruler of Rutlam is said to have shown the greatest bravery in this battle. The Raja of Kota defeated his six brothers in this. About one-half of the Rupput soldiers laid down their precious lives in this battle only for Shah Jahan. Did any body see such a battle before?"

The battle went on the whole day. Aurangzeb was an expert in the art of warfare. His military array was also admirable, moreover his French gunners began to shower cannon on the Rajputs incessantly and yet the Moguls could not defeat the Rajputs who had to discontinue fight as the night came in

But Dara's hope of becoming the emperor were blasted in the battle field for good and all. The whole Imperial Mogul corps joined the enemy who now out numbered the Rajputs under the circumstances it was useless to proceed with the battle. With this idea Jasobant Singh withdrew from the battle field with all his Rajput soldiers. The sun of Dara's sky set for good and all. The fate of the persons who were mentioned in this history were intertwined as it were, with Dara's fate what should be their fate now? What would become of luckless Motiya and ever miserable Protiva? A new change came over the entire Mogul empire in this terrible war

"Now the sagacious Jasobanta Singh understood

this Behind him near Agra many Rajputs had pitched their camps Only Jaysingh of Amber had proceeded towards Bengal to obstruct Suja to coming to Bengal Jasobanta Singh could easily have joined the Rajputs if he had chosen that he did not do, but he made for his own country with all his Rajput soldiers As for Protiva, was she really at Jodhpore and what happened to her?

At having deserted Dara and the old emperor in such a fashion the cup of humiliation on the part of Jasobant singh was full to the brim when he got to his own country. Properly speaking he was not defecated on the Fateyabad plain, on the contrary he became famous in the world on account of his bravery in the field. Such a sudden presence in the country meant before the public eye his defeat. This news had gone to Jodhpur long before he arrived at Jodhpur His heroic wife ordered,—

“Shut the fort door against him This place is not meant for cowards” On coming to the capital Jasobanta Singh found the fort-gate closed and so there was no means of access within He had never fallen into such a difficulty in his life He sent word to his wife as to his arrival She appeared before him saying,—

“Maharaj, for cowards there's no place in Rajputana Win victory and then return, otherwise don't return to country with a bad name on”

“I am not defeated in the battle. Nobody can

say I am. Not a few Rajput heroes are lying prostrate on the battlefield after showing bravery"

"Then what could be the earthly reason why you have returned to country after deserting the old emperor?"

How much Jasobanta Singh coaxed how much he supplicated his wife, but the Maharani was not amenable not having granted permission to the poor Maharaja.

With a dejected heart Jasobanta Singh went back towards Agra. The following day the Mogul camp showed great rejoicing with great hauteur Aurangzeb totally undid the siege laid by Dara with the result that there was no more opposition from the other party for his advancing towards Agra. Great was his rejoicing which was not traceable in him. Only he thanked God in the name of Islam religion.

When the Rajputs withdrew, Aurangzeb laid his camp within that plain. On his victory he gave that place the name of Fateyabad. After wards he established a new town here.

After the battle he saw his brother Murad and having embraced him repeatedly said,—

"Brother, now our aspirations are fulfilled, now I thank my stars that I could make you Badshah"

Murad who was beside himself with joy replied—

"Brother thanks to your kindness that all this has taken place."

" No no, don't you say so ; through God's mercy you must know. It is only for the sake of the Mahamedan religion that He helped you to get the victory. Give Him your heart-felt thanks " returned Aurangzeb.

" Yes, I do thank Him from the core of my heart but I am indebted to you for ever " rejoined Murad.

" Brother, we must start for Agra to-morrow. We ought not to lose a moment " observed Aurangzeb.

" I must abide by your instructions to the very letter "

" As we start to-morrow, you could enjoy yourself a little to-night."

That was just what Murad wanted. After his brother had left he entered his own camp and took to drinking. But that dread night did not come to a close

CHAPTER XIV

IN CAI SENSUALITY

Light measured music went on. The current of lyric songs flowed forth. The jingling twang of the beautifully dancing girls made the heart buoyant.

The fine fragrance of otto and roses made the heart cheer up. As for liquor there was no end to it. To-day Murad became steeped as it were in joviality. For sooth this was the day when he should indulge himself in all such sensual pleasures !

"Murad's beloved bandi would not allow him to take so much liquor but she dared not say anything—only she saw that he did not take too much liquor. Every one was absorbed in revelry. She indulged in it only superficially. With a most scrutinising eye Murad would see that her face had bespoken fear and terrors a swell as gloom. She was at best but a common bandi but she loved Murad with all her heart. Having been absorbed in gaieties the prince could not notice her attitude nor had he the power to do so. To-day he had become emperor after a great fight. Who could be more happy than he ?

After the war one of his most trustworthy courtiers was going to tell him something about his brother Aurangzeb but the prince highly incensed had ordered him to be turned out from the court with a few stripes.

That meant Murad was only driving out his luck repeatedly. No body under the sun does such an act as the foolish Murad did.

At this stage -a eunuch came and brought word that Aurangzeb wanted Murad's chief bandi at once on some political business Murad was not in the least inclined to comply with brother's wishes, but as his brother was chiefly instrumental in his becoming the Badshah, he ought to have complied with any request from his brother not to speak of this simple one and so he ordered the Bandi to see his brother at once The Bandi rose though against her will It was she who had been serving liquor to the prince, now she beckoned another bandi to take charge of her duties , but the one who was seated by her side snatched away the cup and sat close to the prince , at this the chief bandi's face became reddened She was about to tell something but the prince took the other bandi closer and exclaimed with a loud laugh,—

Don't you get annoyed, my darling , Murad is not one's exclusive property, "go to the *Fakir*."

Bandi's face became flushed the more. With great difficulty she controlled herself and having, pressed her lips together she left the prince's camp without speaking a syllable as usual Here merriment went on as usual

Murad's bandi who always suspected Aurangzeb and was afraid of him made for Aurangzeb's camp in a terror She knew her services would not be

required by Aurangzeb under any circumstances whatsoever

But reverse was the thing here! Having come from the merry camp of Murad to that of Aurangzeb the bandi felt that she had plunged herself into an abyss of darkness. She found Aurangzeb seated on a common carpet surrounded by several long bearded Moulvis with big volumes in their hands. The prince was busy conversing with them on religious topics posing himself quite ignorant of the bloodshed which took place only sometime ago. In fact the prince was absorbed in religious conversation.

The bandi stood before the prince *Kurnshing*. The prince told her that he wanted her on a particular political business. There was another *Kurnsh*. Now the prince addressed her —

"I believe you are a trustworthy bandi of my beloved brother"

"The prince looks upon me with feelings of affection" was the modest reply

"You are always with him."

"Out of mere affection he always allows such."

"You know I presume that our beloved brother's life is always valuable before me. Now by the grace of God he has become Badshah and so his life is very valuable in the eyes of the whole Mahomedan community"

What reply could the bandi make? She only gave another *Kurnsh* with a hung-down head

"There might be several persons who would attempt the prince's life for which we must be extremely careful. Could you trust all the bandis that are always with him?" observed Aurangzeb.

"Your worship, I am no better than they. But we are women and so we are always on hostile terms with one another," replied the bandi in a modest tone.

"I am glad that you speak the truth. You can't tell anything concerning others then?" demanded the prince.

"This much I can tell it is only the trustworthy women that are allowed to stay with them. How can I say about other people's minds?"

"What can you do for the prince?"

"I could lay down my life even, if necessary."

"I am glad I could rely upon you for the prince's life. You must always be very cautious, keep a strict eye upon all, now it is only upon his life that the Mahomedan religion and empire solely depend. But you must be very very careful. As far as open injury goes, we are responsible, but as far as secret injury is concerned it is you and none but you are responsible, remember this. Be very careful, now you can leave."

The bandi made for Murad's camp in quick steps. The night was far advanced then. The soldiers were absorbed in sleep after a hard fight. Deep silence reigned in the Mogul court.

On coming before Murad's camp the bandi felt rather bewildered. A few minutes ago she found the camp full of mirth but reverse was the thing now. What was all this? Then was it not Murad's camp? No there was no mistaking as to that. Then was it that the prince had fallen into a sudden sleep and that was why there was no merriment of any kind?

The bandi entered the camp at once where she found the light burning but no bandis or dancing girls. The prince lay on his bed with his head plunged therein. She went up to the prince in haste and made him lie with his head on the pillow.

Born though of Hindu parentage the poor woman had become a Musulman's bandi. She loved Murad with all her heart.

Murad was not a novice in drinking but had been a regular devotee to it for a long time, and she had been in his service for a good many years but she never found him in such a helpless state. The prince was not in his senses. His mouth was foaming all over. Mere wine could not work all this.

The bandi tried her utmost to restore the prince to his consciousness. She sprinkled rose water on his face and head but all her attempts were of no avail.

Fearing it had all been over with the prince the bandi became extremely anxious. She was at a loss to make out what to do under the circumstances. Those who had left him in such a plight must have joined the enemy and so it was useless to send them word who

knows that some of them had not given him poison causing his death ?

Hearing foot steps behind the bandi turned back and was surprised to find that the 'prince Aurangzeb was there in person She was still busy nursing Murad but finding Aurangzeb she jumped up

"It was evident that this was due to excessive drinking I have been here on a particular state business" said Aurangzeb

With these words he stepped up to his brother and having examined his face he ejaculated,—

"Ah me ! Brother is down with illness and there would be danger to his life if he is allowed to remain in this state here "

With these words Aurangzeb stepped out of the camp and the bandi kept standing there like a wooden picture.

In a few minutes Aurangzeb returned with four strong men who at once carried Murad in their arms without speaking a word Then the miserable bandi fell at Aurangzeb's feet supplicating,—

"Will your worship kindly allow me to stay with him "

Aurangzeb paused awhile, then he replied,—

"Stay with him if you like."

On coming outside the bandi saw there were four caparisoned elephants with upwards of four hundred Mogul horsemen ready for Murad. At Aurangzeb's bidding his men carried Murad and seated him on a

Horodah on an elephant back Then Aurangzeb addressed the bandi—

"Go and take your seat by the side of the prince, see that he suffers no inconvenience in any way"

The bandi plainly saw what was going to happen to Murad. Her whole frame became a mass of stone, as it were she seated herself by Murad's side like a puppet. There were about a hundred horsemen behind each elephant. When they got out of the camp they took different paths.

Lest any one should come to know where Murad was going to be sent to. Aurangzeb sent four elephants in different direction attended by one hundred cavalry in each. There was no need for him to be so cautious as every one in the camp was fast asleep due to severe exhaustion.

Aurangzeb easily won over Murad's bandi and dancing girls save and except one. At his command one of them mixed poison with wine and gave it to Murad, the result of which was that Murad became totally unconscious. It would have been much better if the mixture could have finished him

Aurangzeb knew full well nobody would disclose this secret story but he understood that the trust worthy beloved bandi of Murad had come to know every thing and would surely divulge every thing Therefore he thought of finishing her any how but when she wanted to accompany Murad he readily

consented only with the object of keeping her aloof from society along with Murad.

The bandi understood all this, but she was not in the least sorry. Having placed Murad's head on her lap with great care she began to fan him with the skirt of her cloth. The long-looked-for dream of the ill-fated Murad was broken for good and all. When he recovered his sense lo and behold he found himself a captive in the dreadful dungeon of the Gwalior fort. His hopes of becoming Badshah had gone for ever, Now the loss of his life was threatened every moment.

When he saw the bandi with him, he heaved a deep sigh and addressed her in a soft pitiful tone.

"I was under the impression this world is a land of demons, but now I find my mistake and there are men also who have the heart.

Having paused a while he added in a soft tone—

"I never knew that there are dreadful demons in human form in this world before a despicable wretch the Mogul idol could not stay for a minute.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE WAY TO AGRA.

The news of the Fateyabad fight arrived in Agra. Jasobant Singh returned to his own country after the defeat. This news upset the whole country.

A terrible storm rose within the Rang Mahal. No body knew how it would terminate. Sensation prevailed every where. Both the princesses became mad. Jahanara pressed Dara to imprison Roshenara at once as she was communicating everything regarding them to the enemy. But Dara had not the courage to do that. On the other hand he addressed his father —

"I have decided to go to the field in person so you ought not to stay here during my absence. As you are ill you had better go to Kashmir for sometime."

With a sad laugh the Badshah replied —

'My son I want to pass the remainder of my days here and so do not like to move an inch from my Taj. There is no more enjoyment for me only I want to lie side by side within my Taj for good and all. Who ever among you might be Badshah, you would not stand in my way I hope.'

Jahanara intervened rather in a choked voice —

'Father should Auranzeb be the emperor there is a danger of my life and yet I won't leave you under any circumstances.'

Holding his beloved daughter by the hand, the emperor replied rather in sadness,—

“Jahanara, you are my daughter worthy of the name

Now Dara began to gather soldiers. Even then the Rajput rulers sat hemming in Agra with their soldiers so that Aurangzeb could not easily enter the town especially there was a terrible row among his troops on account of Murad’s disappearance. He had not the courage enough to advance onwards until he pacified them. He was coming towards Agra slowly, Dara on the other hand, advanced with the object of humiliating his brother

Just on the eve of his departure Dara addressed his son—

“Lali, I have sent Raja Joy Singh to obstruct Suja on the way, you just take five thousand soldiers with you and go and help him without losing a moment.”

Lali Sahib had not the slightest intention to leave Agra for various reasons and so he replied,—

“Whom shall I put in charge of the fort in that case” was the query

“I shall see to that” was the reply

In history, Lali Sahib was styled as prince soleman. He was called Lali Sahib on account of his handsome appearance. He was about twenty-two at the time we are speaking.

On coming out he told everything to Sailesh Roy who said,—

I wish I could go and fight with Aurangzeb.

"Your going to the field is out of the question" was the reply

Sallesh replied in extreme surprise,—

How is that? I'm your body-guard and so I ought to be with you always.

"Both father and myself have to leave Agra and go to the field. Those who would remain here are our friend or enemies as to which I have not the least idea. This much is certain that we can't believe anybody except Jahanara. Here we must have men in whom we can confide fully" was the reply

Sallesh returned —

'I'm glad you have got confidence me. But —'

'There is no "but" here. You have always, to look to our interest. You have to gather privately and to communicate to us everything which transpires here.'

"I shall be the last person to part with you.'

"You have to stay here at the calls of duty. Besides Gul whose whereabouts are not known yet, must be ferretted out, more over the Sannyasini who is staying in the Begum Mahal her welfare must be looked to as well. Who could guarantee we would return to Agra! You being to another country and so you could easily go to your own country with the Sannyasini as well as Protiva if you could find her"

While saying all this the prince's voice became

almost choked. He turned away his face. Now Sailesh Roy questioned,—

“What should be my duties here?”

“The same duties as, before. From to-day, you and the Rajput soldiers under you are appointed as the bodyguard of the emperor and Jahanara both.”

“Whose command shall I carry out?”

“When there’s a command either from the emperor or the princess, you must carry it out at once, otherwise you must do whatever you would deem proper.”

“When will you start, pray?”

“To-day, no time to lose,”

With these words the prince was about to enter his quarters when he turned back adding,—

“Another serious task—you must keep a strict eye upon certain persons.”

On Lali Sahib’s departure Sailesh kept standing there musing; then he exclaimed in a tone of pity.—

“At what an inauspicious moment I must have arrived at Agra! I am simply being burnt by a terrible fire, day and night. I obtained a high post in the court after all, and so thought, I should be happy now. But Heaven wills it otherwise. When Aurangzeb has won the victory in the first battle, then who knows what would be our fate? I am Dara’s man. Where would my post be or my head? At what an unlucky hour I must have seen Protiva! Will it ever fall to my lot to meet her again? It was she who was the

root-cause of this terrible fire with which I am being burnt by inches?"

At this stage there was an uproar outside. Every heart was filled with consternation and so many rushed out of the fort to see what it was about and consider 'ng the onerous duties entrusted to him Sallesh also hastened outside.

On coming to his bed chamber Lall Sahib found Motiya seated on a chair asleep. She was in a warrior's dress. She had not a wink of sleep the previous night. The prince kept on gazing on her with steadfast eyes. Then he bent himself and kissed on her rasy cheeks.

"Surprised, Motiya started up with a big jump. Immediately she was about to bring out her sword from the sheath but she laughed out saying —

"Oh, is it you?"

"Who could be so audacious as to do that?"

Without heeding the prince's words Motiya demand ed in an anxious tone,—

"Why do you look so sad?"

"I am leaving you. It is no wonder that I would look so."

"Leaving us? Eh! was the anxious query

"I am off for the field with father's command."

"It is no wonder that the hero 'and son' of a hero would go to the field. Your fore-fathers from Babar downwards have all been in the field and so you have to fight a 'great many battles. There is nothing to be wondered at."

"I know. I know, too, fighting is our chief occupation. That I shall go to the field is a fact at which Babar's descendants would feel rejoiced. One thing pains me very much that I shall have to leave you all."

"Whom are you speaking of leaving?"

"Well, you—all of you."

"Excluding me, surely. Wherever you would be, I must be. What is the good of my putting on the garb of a male person? Don't you know I, a Turkish girl, am not in the least afraid of the fight?"

"Sailesh Roy was anxious to go with me, when I explained to him everything he has consented to stay here."

"He ought to stay here as you and your father are going to the field. A competent and trustworthy man must remain here, especially when Gul has not been traced out. Dulali is within the Begum Mahal, more over,—"

The prince said rather in a smile,—

"She has consented to stay here, so that there is no more anxiety on her account."

"Have you got anything more to say?"

What I mean is that you ought to stay here under the circumstances.

"For Heaven's sake, prince, don't you order so. there is no other place for me except your company."

"Had you stayed here, you could have kept a strict eye upon our enemies."

"Sailish Roy outside and Dulall inside that would be enough to keep us from any danger"

"No! what's written in our fore-head no body could foretell. It might be we shan't return to Agra."

"Don't you utter so. You would returned to Agra in triumph after a great victory."

Aurangzeb has won the first victory. We have heard of Murad's disappearance.

Luck follows Aurangzeb and so who knows we shan't have the same fate as Murad when we fall into the cruel hands of Aurangzeb."

"I must have the same fate as you"

"Supposing you are made a captive. Then?—

"What's this sword for? The Turkish girl knows very well how to drive the sword into her own breast."

Execution would be our fate only if we fall into their hands."

The executioner has to chop off two heads all at once in that case. Prince, this slave is always at your service. I will never leave your company. Why do you waste your time in this idle talk? It is you who shall win the victory. Dara would succeed to the throne of his good father and after him you would be the emperor. Don't you fling these false threats.

Having heaved a deep sigh Lall Sahib said in a sad tone,—

"Moti, you have little idea about the Mogul Dynesty. Very well, be ready then, I start in a couple of hours"

"Ready I am."

The prince said to himself in a sad tone,—

"I am not worthy of the love this girl entertains for me. Shall I ever be able to repay this genuine love? Heaven knows what is in store for me."

CHAPTER XVI

CHANGE

A great change had come over the fate of Agra. Dara had already started with about a lac of soldiers and a good many guns to fight with Aurangzeb. Prince Lali Sahib alias Soleman Shao had already proceeded towards Allahabad to obstruct Suja on the way—with there departure a great change had naturally come over Agra. People had not the boldness to speak in a loud tone everybody had been discussing about this terrible fight rather in private.

The business at Agra had entirely been at a stand still. Many were lying indoors concealed while several others had fled to the far-off country. The whole town seemed to have been covered with a cloud of sadness and stillness. In fact that ever-gay Agra looked otherwise. Those Amirs and Omraos who had always indulged themselves in pleasures had all gone to fight on behalf of either side, friends or foe. All along the citizens were enjoying peace, but now sign of gloominess all over. Now they were heaving deep sighs looking towards the Taj and thinking to themselves that their peace of mind had all gone with Mum Taj Mahal's demise.

As for the fort, it was not the same fort as before. Only with a handful of soldiers Azam Khan was defending the fort. A thousand Rajputs lay encamped on the banks of the Jumna as before, but Sailes had lost their sympathy. He understood plainly he could not lay confidence on them even for a minute.

They would without any scruples join the party who would show signs of victory. For all these reasons Sailes looked blank all around. Lali Sahib's departure had made him feel it more keenly. He had not a minute's peace. Perhaps he would not have felt so much if he had any particular task to perform, infact he had no other person to speak to except his servant Gangaram. For some time past Pandayji and Hingan Khan had not shown themselves. Infact there was no clue to their whereabouts.

There was no rejoicing within the Begum Mahal. The Badshah lay confined in bed. Jahanara was always with him. No body spoke in a loud tone. An undreamt-of silence prevailed in the Rangmahal. There was no junketing of any kind—merry jokes, singing and dancing, etc.

Jahanara was always busy attending to her father not caring to look after the Begum mahal. So Roshenara was all in all. She said openly that Aurangzeb would be the emperor as Dara had no chance of returning to Agra.

Thinking it was not proper for Dulali to stay there

In that condition Dulall addressed Jahanara one day'—

I ought not to stay here any more.'

"How can you go away leaving father in such a sad plight?"

"I'm not going to leave Agra. I might be of some service to Dara while I am out of the Begum mahal but not so long as I am here.'

'Shall I tell father about it?'

"He is ill and so should not be disturbed. I'm here yet and will see him when I find an opportunity."

Jahanara raised no more objection. She called eunuch Gani and told him to make all possible arrangements for Dulall's departure. That very evening Dulall left the fort.

Seated within his solitary room Sailesh Ray one day was thinking various thoughts. There was no end to it. He was sorely anxious for Protiva. His anxiety increased a hundred fold only because she had not been traced out. Gangaram was preparing his meals inside when he looked towards the door startled. It was a woman.

A candle was burning in a corner of the room dimly so it was hard for him to make out the woman but he understood that she was a common up country woman— might be a fruit seller.

When the woman stepped up to him Sailesh exclaimed with emotion

'Eh! You here.

"I have just left the Begum Mahal, Both Dara

and Lali have left Agra. What's the use of staying at the Begum Mahal ? Rather I would do much if I am out side.'

"Cheered up Sailesh replied,—

"You have done well I am alone and so don't know what I should do Now I shall be able to consult with you in all my actions."

"It is for this reason that I have come here. I have been to Dayamani's place again."

"Well and good. What should we do now ?"

"Protiva's recovery should be our first aim"

"Protiva's recovery ! Have you got a clue to her whereabouts ?"

"Rather I was not sitting at the Rang Mahal"

"That I know Is she at Jodhpore ?"

"It is a lie—sheer lie, I don't know why Jasobant Singh said so."

"That upcountry man promised to give me the correct information if he was paid for it.

"Which upcountry man mean ?"

"Who came with me from Benares and about to whom I told you ?"

"Oh! I understand, Where's he now ?"

"That I know not, Last few days both he and Hingan are not in evidence."

"Did you speak about them to Lali Sahib ?"

"Yes, every thing "

"What steps did he take ?"

"He told me nothing. only this much if that

wretched rascal knew about Protiva he also would know about her ”

“Did you make enquiries as to their disappearance ?”

“Yes, I went to Hingan Khan’s house and made enquiries there. His servant could not tell me anything about his master. He told me that he had gone to bring a Baiji after giving wine and food to his master”

“Where did Hingan get money so suddenly ?”

“He said that a young Mahamedan boy came to Hingan and gave him money. On his return he found no body in the room. There was enacted a terrible affair in the room resulting in bloodshed and since then no clue to their whereabouts.”

“Was that up-country man also there ?”

“Yes he also was there.”

Dulali paused for a while and then said —

“I believe that Mahamedan boy was no other than Motiya ?”

With extreme surprise Sailesh exclaimed —

“Was it Motiya ?”

“Yes, this is my conviction. I believe also that the prince was close by. He arrived in time and have kept them concealed.”

But what could be the earthly reason for him to keep me in the dark about it ?”

Dulali said in a laugh —

“This is called Imperial whim”

“His intention is to bring Protiva before you quite unawares, and thus to cause you surprise.”

This explanation did not satisfy Sailesh. However he paused a while before adding—

"Have you got, a clue to Protiva's whereabouts?"

"Whatever I have gathered I don't know whether it is correct. I have come to know many things while at the Begum Mahal. My conviction is that it is Roshenara who had kept her under concealment."

With extreme surprise Sailesh burst out—

Roshenara ! and why ?"

"Why ? only to wound sister's feeling, there might be other motives "

"How dreadful ! Where has she been kept concealed ?"

"That I can't tell for certain. It is our duty now to find that out"

"What you have gathered, kindly tell me"

"I have won over one of Roshenara's bandis, who has furnished me with this information "

"Kindly tell me at once what more you have heard."

"I hear that on receiving a forged letter under your name through Fatema Protiva left the fort without any body's knowledge"

"Eh ! A forged letter under my name !"

"Yes, it was written therein that you would fall into a dreadful danger if Protiva did not meet you that night,"

"What danger ?"

"Murad also sent men to take her away and what happened then, we all know. Roshenara kept

a 'few trust worthy men ready in hand. She did not like to see that the poor girl would go into brother's hands but she was very careful at the same time not to let brother know her actions and motives. Her men were lying in ambush and they would snatch away the girl from Murad's hands if necessity arose.'

'How dreadful? There's no work under the sun these people are not up to. So much roguery with brother!'

When there was a fight between Jahanara's men and Murad's men over this girl we took her away but she fled from us on the belief that we were her enemies, it is presumed therefore she has fallen into the hands of Roshenara's men.

'What does the bandi say?"

'She can't tell anything more"

It was very wrong of Protiva to have thus run away"

'We could not have saved her even if she did not. They would have taken her away after murdering us.'

"Was this body of mine without any strength? I could have saved her from the hands of these ruffians even at the risk of my life.'

"We were without any weapons and so we would be quite useless. They would have murdered us, sure as a fate."

Having paused a while Sallesh observed—

"What could be the remedy now?

"My conviction is it is Roshenara who has detained Protiva. Now that Dara and Lali Sahib are not here Jahnara cannot take any action under the present circumstances."

Sailesh observed in a great dispondent tone,—

"What's the remedy then?"

"Roshenara knows how to steal away a girl. But do we not? We would also pay her in her own coins by stealing away the girl."

CHAPTER XVII

HOPE ENDS.

Dara's hopes were all gone. He fell upon Aurangzeb with great enthusiasm but only to be defeated. About thirty miles from Agra was situated the plain of Samaghar where a terrible fight took place between the two brothers.

No body can over-rule the decrees of fate. Dara was defeated with thrice the number of troops Aurangzeb had with him. When during the fight Dara encouraged his own troops from elephant-back to fight more vehemently a bullet came upon his elephant which caused the animal to run amuck and so he was obliged to alight with a jump. At this stage a Howdah man was blown away by the cannon ball no body knew where. As for Dara he was no longer seen he was given up for lost or killed in the action. Thinking all this his troops took to flight and everything was over. The sun of Dara's sky set for good and all finding it would be quite hopeless Dara fled from the field of battle.

A dreadful affair followed when the news arrived at Agra. Every body loved Dara nay esteemed him but no body had the confidence in Aurangzeb. People knew he had a strong hatred towards the Hindus. When they came to hear that Dara was defeated the

Hindu residents of Agra began to run away leaving their houses behind. This gave the country men the opportunity to commit plunder and pillage

When sailesh heard about this, he told his Rajput soldiers to follow him only to save the citizens from the hands of the plunderers but far from obeying his orders, they made for their own homes. The condition of Sailesh's mind at that time was simply indescribable. Finding himself quite at a loss what to do he got almost frantic. In a single day the big post of a general of one thousand soldiers was lost to him and he became the same street beggar as ever.

A great storm arose all around. No discipline throughout Agra Marauding and disturbance all over. Nearly half the population of Agra ran away for fear of their lives. It was a thing which was beyond the power of pen to describe.

There was a sensation in the Begam Mahal also. The bandis ran away with whatever they could lay their hands on, there being no one to keep them under control. Suja, Aurangzeb and Murad, had taken their respective bandis and begums with them. It was only Dara's family who were within the fort. Now when they came to hear about the result of the fight, they all took a few trustworthy men with whom they fled from the fort with all their belongings and ran towards Lahore as they meant to join Dara where he had already fled.

Only the old emperor remained in the fort. The

loving dutiful daughter, regardless of her own life, did not leave her sick father. Within the entire Begum Mahal it was only the father and daughter who lived there. As for princess Roshenara, she left the fort and went to see her victorious brother.

As for Salleh Ray, he found nothing but darkness all around. In this strange place he was rather placed in worst circumstances at present. Formerly his life was not in jeopardy with no fear of execution. But now there was danger to his life every moment. Many had come to know that he was Dara's man and so his head would be severed from his body sure as fate, only if he should fall into the cruel hands of Aurangzeb.

The miserable Salleh Ray comprehended all this. He understood too that there was no other alternative than flight, who would help him now. But he heard that Protiva was at Agra and that was why he was not willing to move an inch from here.

He wavered for a couple of days without moving away from Agra. During this time he had no news from Dulali. She promised to see him but did not keep her word. She told him not to move away from the spot as she meant to see him there for this simple reason he was not inclined to leave Agra.

On the third day after the fight Aurangzeb came near Agra with all his troops. Thinking it unsafe to stay here any more Salleh fled from Agra with his servant. Every one was flying sensation

all over and so he was not noticed by any body. He put off the warrior's dress and having garbed himself as a common citizen he left the town

Sailesh Ray had called at Dayamony's place but no Dulali there. No body could furnish information about her. Early morning she left without telling others know where she was going. Agra was not in safety now and so Sailesh Ray became sorely anxious for her

Thinking it was useless to talk with this old woman Sailesh Ray began to wait at the Jumna ghat with a dejected heart. He felt extremely restless. Gangaram was only muttering to himself as usual. The circumstances into which Sailesh had fallen were simply indescribable. For a while he sat down, then again he rose and paced to and fro and then again he got up. Infact he could not sit at one place for some length of time

On hearing of some quick steps behind at about 9 o'clock in the evening he turned back startled and found that Dulali for whom he was so anxious had turned up. At this his heart was filled with ecstasy. Dulali gave him no time to speak, she only said,—

“Lose a moment and every thing will be spoilt. This is the golden opportunity for us”

Sailesh was going to tell her some thing but Dulali interrupted him with the words—

“You will hear every thing afterwards—Come on now.”

At this Sailesh followed her

When Sailesh entered the room, he was rather surprised to find two sturdy Moguls in warrior's dress. He kept on looking at them with steadfast eyes at which Dulall said rather amused —

'No fear. These are my men. You will also have to dress as a Mogul to night.'

'Why, why, where have to go to?' demanded Sailesh Roy

To Agra. If we could recover Protiva to-night well and good otherwise her recovery would turn out to be an impossibility.

"Have you come to know where she is?" was the emotional question.

"I will tell you every thing later on. You just change your dress and put on the dress of a Mogul warrior"

Why so?"

"We shall have to go to Agra,—amidst enemies you must know Agra is hemmed in by Moguls who are all Aurangzeb's men. Under the circumstances no body would detect us if we are dressed as Moguls."

Without uttering a syllable Sailesh Roy began to change his dress. In a trice he was metamorphosed into a veritable Mogul by Dulall—an adept in the art of simulation. On tying up a sword in his waistband she questioned —

"You have strength in your arms, I presume?"

Sailesh replied rather in haughten,

"Unfortunelly I have not got the opportunity yet to show what I am

"A golden opportunity has presented itself now, Both strength and valour are necessary , a very serious task".

"Where have we to go ?

"You will come to know it ere long

I know you love Protiva with all your heart ; I know, too, you would lay down your life only if you could recover her , on the other side, the indomitable princess Roshenara is the sovereign of Delhi now."

"Have you got any news about the prince Dara?"

"He has run away from the field after a defeat. His hopes of wearing the crown are all gone. His capture now means the severance of his head from the body.

"What about Lali Sahib, pray ?"

"True he defeated Suja with the help of Jay Singh, but the Rajput ruler deserted him when he heard of Dara's defeat and Aurangzeb's victory. I hear that Lali-Sahib has gone away with a handful of men with him."

"What about Motiya ?"

" If she is not killed in the action, she must be with Lali Sahib."

With a deep sigh Sailesh exclaimed,—

"Now every thing is over. It is a sin to stay with these Moguls They are devoid of every thing—regard for parents, affection for brother's, devoid infact of all

the finer elements worthy of man. Lall Sahib always used to stay —

"It is a curse from above upon the Mogul Dynasty."

"I don't think any body will escape the ruthless hands of Aurangzeb who knows that the demon will not commit patricide" replied Dulali in a sad tone,—

Sailesh rejoined startled,—

"How dreadful! absurd—absurd on the very face of it: Man is not up to such a heinous crime."

'The term 'absurd' is not in Aurangzeb's vocabulary. He it was who won Murad over by holding out the hope of making him the emperor and then sent him over where Heaven knows, he will make away with all his kinsmen and relations.

"Will the Rajputs allow him to do this?"

"It is not in their power to cope with him. But you will find that Aurangzeb's hatred towards the Hindus would bring about the downfall of the Mogul empire. I was not far wrong when I predicted on the funeral days of Mam Tajmahal. There goes away the Mogul idol. On that very day was sown the seed of the downfall tree. Aurangzeb's Mogul empire would not last. Let it alone. We need not discuss these matters at present. Now the only object which compells us to stay here is Protiva's recovery."

"Why do you delay then?" said Sailesh in an emotion.

"No more delay. Come sharp. The swift boat

CHAPTER XV

NOCTURNAL EXPEDITION

It was in this boat that Salleh Ray had gone to Agra with Lali Sahib once before. It was the very same boat in which Salleh Ray was again going to-day. But where was that lovely Lali Sahib the beloved-of all beloved to-day? He who was pre-destined to become Emperor of Delhi is doomed to be the street beggar to-day. We know not with what difficulty he was passing his days in the jungle without food. Even with all this short acquaintance they became very intimate with each other. So Salleh began to love him as a brother. While sitting in the boat to-day the associations connected with Lali Sahib came uppermost in his mind and so he began to feel it too keenly. He said to himself —

"He it was who gave shelter to this helpless and homeless beggar. I wish I could have stayed with him now!"

Salleh consoled himself with the words —

"I am not in fault. He it was who forbade me to accompany him."

Then he thought to himself, —

"I am an insignificant being and so I ought not

to meddle in this throne affair. Should I ever succeed in recovering Protiva and make her over to her parents, that would be the proper vengeance on my part. Would it not?"

Dulali addressed him abruptly,—

"Sailesh Ray, we might have recourse to homicide could you do that for Protiva?"

"Homicide is permissible during warfare. Which warrior falls back from that?"

"We must try to avoid actions by all means; consequently it would be necessary to murder sentinels there."

At these words Sailesh started up. He did not remember if he had ever killed an ant in his life but now he had to commit homicide. So he replied,—

"Such a treacherous crime I have never committed in my life nor do I advise any one to commit such an act."

Dulali said in a smile,—

"I have been within the Mogul court from a child and therefore I do not shudder when I hear of such a thing. I have seen persons who have been thrown down the top of the fort, I have seen persons who have been crushed to death under the feet of the elephant, I have also seen people who have been devoured by dogs."

Sailesh Ray exclaimed in an emotion,—

"I beg your pardon. I don't like to hear of the misdeeds of the Moguls. They are demons in human shape."

Dulali said in a laugh —

We must hold "Set a thief to catch a thief" policy here. What I mean to say is that we must have to prove ourselves demons when we have to recover Protiva from the hands of the demons ; unnecessary bloodshed I must tell you is not my intention. Should we gain our end without bloodshed, well and good. But we must be prepared to make away with some lives if necessary'

Sailesh Ray uttered not a syllable. After a slight pause Dulali said,—

"It is therefore I have brought two men with me, they won't scruple in the least to make proper use of the dagger in darkness.

To speak the plain truth Sailesh Roy did not like Dulali's words without making any reply to her words he demanded —

We are going to the other side of the river. At what particular spot is she kept, pray ?

Dulali said,—

"This side is full of Moguls. They are making merry day and night. I hear Aurangzeb had got possession of the treasury has made large rewards to his soldiers and hence they are so full of mirth."

Did you go to Agra ?

"I did otherwise how could I gather so much information you must know no other person would have dared to go there. No woman is safe in Agra to-day I warrant you.

"How dreadful ! you ought not to have gone there at all "

"No body cared to look at me, dressed as I was an ugly mad woman."

"Did you get any news about the emperor ?"

"I am told both the emperor and princess Jahanara are made captives as Aurangzeb had kept sentinels there "

" How shocking that the son would deal with father in this fashion !"

" But I hear too that Aurangzeb did not enter the fort, He wrote a letter to his father with much apology stating that Dara should not be given so much indulgence and that he was an infidel and so he must be proclaimed as an abdicated son But finding the Badshah throwing cold water on his proposal Aurangzeb has appointed his son Mahamad Sultan as commander of the Fort Both father and daughter have been confined."

"Had the wretched rascal put the emperor into jail ?"

"No, no he has not gone so far They are at present in the same state as before with this difference that they are no longer in touch with outsiders Virtually speaking,—Aurangzeb is the emperor now"

At this time Sailesh Ray looked towards the coast saying,—

"We are just passing Agra "

"We are for Khushru Bagh the garden belonging to Roshenara." said Dulali

"Roshenara's garden ! Is Protiva there ?" demanded Sailesh in an anxious tone.

Yes this is what I have heard I hear that Protiva has been kept confined and concealed there."

Is there any certainty as to this ?

It is a moral certainty When Roshenara does not stay there a durwan is placed at the gate besides the gardener I have formed an acquaintance with the Durwan who would await my presence there at mid night

Does he say that Protiva is there ?"

"No he has not said so. Probably he does not know anything about her Roshenara sends a new servant every day This man has come here in the morning and will go away when another servant comes in to-morrow morning"

Why so ?

This gives me grave suspicion that Protiva has been kept in concealment here. My suspicion is confirmed the more for the following reason. when I asked his permission to go into and have a visit of the garden, he raised no objection and so showed me it. On close examination I found nobody there, but found the garden well furnished. I think there were any secret chambers within

How then could she be concealed there ?"

I noticed a bower just behind the building which was patrolled by a Khoja. I wanted to go over there but the Darwan stood in my way saying no body was

ordered to go to that quarter. I tried to persuade him by various means and yet, he said that the place was guarded by a khoja as the princess had her treasury there where all her valuables had been kept."

"Did you find any room there?"

No room fell in sight. The place was surrounded by walls of creepers. My firm conviction is that there must be chambers within the bower where the poor girl is kept."

"It may be treasury, also. Eh?"

"May be. But we must remove our doubts. We must try our utmost. Should we fail in our attempts we shall have only to curse our own fate. I am the last person to imagine that Roshenara would keep her valuables here instead of keeping them within the fort."

"Mogul's fort always changes hands. To-day it belongs to one, but to-morrow it goes into some other hands. Just see only two days ago the fort belonged to Dara, but to-day it is Aurangzeb's property. Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that Roshenara would keep her belongings concealed in this garden".

"Well, I can't refuse your argument. It may be quite possible. But I have gathered from my recent stay at the begum mahal that it is Roshenara who has stolen away Protiva, for a certain motive and as Protiva is not in the Begum Mahal, I am inclined to believe that she is confined within the garden in question."

'Supposing she is not in the garden there would be unnecessary homicide."

"unnecessary homicide I am not inclined for? Let me see how matters stand oh! what impossibilities I had to achieve while I was in touch with the Moguls in my childhood In this old age also I meet with a similar fate."

All this is due to my misfortune. You would have returned to your own country had you not met this miserable self"

Heaven wills it so."

The boat passed Agra and went far off towards the west and had gone almost to the coast. Dulali looked around and then said —

Now go across the river'

The boat plied on as ordered. Sailesh's mind was perturbed with no end of anxieties. He spoke not a word but sat quiet. Dulali also turned her attention away. When the boat got to the shore both of them looked in that direction quite startled.

They noticed there were no human beings on the spot where the boat stopped. An extensive plain in front with no human habitation close by! Dulali got down from the boat at once along with her Sailesh and two of her men. Then she addressed the boatman —

"Don't you go away until we return."

Then they all proceeded in quick steps. The night was dreadfully dark with no human being on the way. Solemn silence reigned every where. Only the deafen-

ing buzzing of the cricket made the place more frightful. The mirthful revelry of the Moguls became audible at the far-off Agra

Having come to a short distance Dulali said,—

“As for the door keeper I am responsible, But as far as the Khoja is concerned you, must deal with him according to the exigencies of the case and in time of need these two men would help you

“Are there any other men in the garden ?”

“When I called there, I found no other persons except the Durwan and the khoja But I heard there were ten gardeners also whose quarters are situated in a corner They must have been asleep by this time or they might have gone to Agra for merry making ”

Every one became silent All advanced on with hasty steps in front of Roshenara’s pleasure garden Khushru Bagh, Dulali stopped and said in a low tone —

“ You just lie concealed some where closely, as soon as you hear the sound of a bugle, you must hasten to the spot at once , Should you not hear from me in half an hour you must presume I have fallen into a great danger And then do what you would consider best”

“ Should you commit yourself in this way ?” observed Sailesh Ray,

“ Danger every where Be very cautious ” replied Dulali in a smile With these words Dulali entered the

garden in hasty steps. With a heaving breast Sailesh lay concealed behind a bush on road-side. The crickets seemed to make more noise while the fire-flies (threw gold, as it were amid darkness.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITHIN THE SECRET CHAMBER.

On entering the garden Dulali found that a light was burning in the Durwan's room, but there was no person within. Rather surprised she stood at the door and thought the Durwan had perhaps gone to Agra, but it occurred to her at the same time that was impossible for in that case he would not have kept the door open. He must be somewhere closely?

At this time some one addressed Dulali from behind,—

" You have come after all, my good lady. I thought you would not come and so every thing will be spoilt "

Dulali said in a smile,—

" We never fail in keeping our appointments on the contrary you do."

" Not in such matters. Come in sit down."

Dulali entered the room and sat down on the charpoi. When Dulali brought out a bottle of wine from underneath her garment, the Durwan exclaimed,

" What's this eh "

Having laughed a fascinating laugh Dulali replied,—

" I have brought a little liquor which would simply add to our merriment."

The Durwan who was a Mahomedan laughed a heartily laugh observing,—

‘ How excellent ! I too, was anxious for it and so went to the princess chamber ’

“ Have you found any ? ”

Far from it. She is the last person to keep any thing behind ’

“ Take a little. Please let me have a cup ”

The Mahomedan immediately complied with Dulali’s request. Dulali filled it with liquor and held it to his mouth. At this the Mahamedan replied —

How preposterous ! you must have it first.

“ I am a Hindu. It is against our religion to take any thing first. Male persons have always the preference, you take it first and then I take it ”

“ Very well ”

With these words the Durwan took the whole quantity at a sip then with a distorted face he spoke out —

“ How strong ! I feel so giddy ”

He stretched out his arms only to embrace Dulali but in the twinkling of an eye Dulali jumped up. Then she gave him a smart push which caused him to fall on to the cot. He had not the power to stand. He tried once to get up but remained there like a lifeless figure.

Having looked at him for sometimes she gave him several pushes to make herself sure that he was really unconscious. When she was fully convinced she put out

the light and having got out of the room put the chain on to the hooks at the tops of the threshold.

Then she came out of the garden and looked very carefully on all sides. There was nobody, dead darkness and silence prevailed all over. The mirthful revelry was practically over.

As soon as Dulali sounded the bugle, Sailesh Ray and the two companions hastened to the spot, Dulali said in a very low tone,—

"There is no fear at the hands of the Durwan. He has fallen asleep and won't wake up till 9 o' clock to-morrow morning

Having passed through the garden stealthily, they got at the back at last. At certain places, they placed their ear if they could hear anything, but they heard nothing Dulali said in a subdued tone,—

"Just, wait."

Dulali advanced a little. She found a light burning within the bower the gleam of which peeped through the creepers. He heard some body singing in a low tone.

Dulali returned and addressed them in a soft tone

"The khoja is awake. All of you go right in. Don't make away with him unless absolutely necessary, let me stay here, I will sound the bugle if necessary. Only see that the fellow can not make any noise whatever"

Sailesh Ray went on stealthily followed by his companions. On peeping in at the bower they noticed

the sentinel with a musket on his shoulder was pacing up and down singing. On hearing foot steps the fellow stopped for a while and again began to pace forwards and backwards uttering to himself it must be a jackal.

For about five minutes Sailesh kept standing there with a suspended breath. Then as soon as the fellow passed on with his back towards Sailesh, Sailesh fell upon him from behind like an infuriated lion. Having been attacked unawares by Sailesh his musket fell down from his hand and along with it both he and Sailesh fell to the ground. That robust person tried hard to rise, but he failed in his attempt as he was tied face hands and feet by Sailesh's companions. He could not make any noise nor could he stir a bit.

At the sound of scuffling Dulali peeped in at the bower. Having advanced a little she addressed the two men — 'Two of you just take this man away keep him concealed at a distance and stay there. You must see he can neither run away nor make any noise whatever. You must come out at the sound of the bugle. Use the dagger if urgently needed.'

At once they carried out Dulali's orders. The bower was lighted to some extent by a lantern burning from above. That light helped Dulali to find a small iron door there, the key of which was fortunately hanging above the door. Dulali addressed Sailesh Ray —

"I keep watch outside. Should any body happen to come in or should I find any imminent danger I would sound the bugle at once. You must turn tall then and

there, See what is inside. May the All-merciful fulfil our pryer in recovering Protiva."

With these words Dulali left the place at once and went to her former post where she had been patrolling. Sailesh unlocked the door. He feared it would require much strength to open the door as it was so massive, but the door was constructed with such a peculiar skill that it yielded to the slightest push—without any noise what-so-ever Sailesh got extremely surprised at what he had seen. A flight of beautiful marble stairs went right down. There was a fine chandelier just overhead the light of which illuminated the whole staircase. Sailesh thought within himself,—

"This does not look like a treasury, especially these lights are surely lighted regularly. Let me examine what is below stairs." With the drawn sword Sailesh got below. Then whatever he had seen there was beyond imagination. He thought he had been translated into a land of dreams, the beauty of which could not be described

On either side of the staircase, there were two large chambers. These were furnished with the best articles under the sun. Beautiful hundred-armed chandeliers were hanging from the ceiling whereas on the floor there was spread a very soft carpet. On the walls there were large looking-glasses with gold frame as well as beautiful love-stirring pictures. Various gold vessels set with precious jewels added to the furniture of the chambers. The whole spot was perfumed wlth otto and roses of the

best quality. A delightfully cool and captivating place it was. It would be no exaggeration to call it a second paradise. Lacs of rupees must have been spent in furnishing these rooms. At every door brocade screens were hanging. The gold-embellished velvet bedding in the rooms emitted fine fragrance which bespoke the presence of a lady there. Sallesh never dreamt that such a paradise could possibly exist below stairs.

All on a sudden Sallesh exclaimed —

'I hear the Badshah has got shishmahal underneath the Begum Mahal. Here the emperor with his Begum lives in the hot weather. This place seems to be Roshenara's shishmahal.'

Suddenly Sallesh's heart began to heave up. He heard that the princess (Roshenara) was not in the fort, having gone out to see her brother. If she has actually come here she must have come with her retinue. Should he be caught red-handed that means a sure death to him as human life is less insignificant than an ant's life before the princes and princesses.

On finding the room illuminated with perfumed light he said to himself —

"There must be somebody here else why should the light be burning?" Probably the princess is staying here. I find there are other rooms also. Those must be bed-rooms. I don't think it safe to stay here now.

It occurred to him again —

'Could the place be patrolled by a khoya noly

during the princess' stay here? Surely Gama would have been here with his full force, but it might be they have been granted holiday."

Sailesh got quite puzzled as to his future proceedings while here. He was not safe even for a minute. He might lose his life any moment. It was quite a trespass on his part to have come here. But he was not a coward; he had a sword in his hand and strength in his body. Should he die, he would fight to death. At this stage he thought whether it was proper for him to inform Dulali about the surroundings. He placed his ear if he could hear any noise. There was no noise or sound of any kind, such a solemn silence he had not experienced before. He thought to himself,—

"Perhaps nobody is here. Quite an imperial custom, probably the Shishmahal is always lighted in this position whether the princess is here or not. Oh? What an enormous sum they waste in this manner! With this money many lives could be saved from the hands of starvation."

Sailesh wanted to look into the place more closely. He said,—

"There must be a woman here if at all, so that there is nothing to fear on that score. Let me look into this side."

Having moved the brocade screen he got into a smaller room. This room was also exquisitely furnished. It was the dining room, as it was evident from

the fact that two persons had just finished their meals and had left the eatables which they could not do full justice to. Sallesh thought also that they could not be ordinary persons as the vessels used were all of gold.

Sallesh now went to the adjoining room and found it was the bath room. Such a bath room he had never seen in his life before. The whole room was set in oyster with workmanship so exquisite that it looked like a peacock distending its tall feathers in a beautiful manner. Finding no other room on that side he did not go farther but returned.

Then he turned his direction towards the drawing room on the other side. He removed the screen and found it was illuminated like the previous ones with more costly furniture. Noiselessly he entered the room and lo and behold ! there was a lady lying asleep on an ivory cot.

Sallesh took his stand quite bewildered. This intrusion on his part would mean nothing short of capital punishment.

"Was it princess Roshenera ?" he asked himself.

Then what happened Sallesh could not make out ! Only he perceived that a sharp sword glittered near his heart and along with it he kicked a person at a distance. In a trice he went up and having placed his leg on that prostrate body and sword on the throat burst forth with grinding teeth.

"Make noise and the sword shall go right into your neck"

At this juncture a sweet voice came up from behind,—

"For Heaven's sake, don't kill Fatema"

CHAPTER XX.

DARA IMPRISONED.

The old Emperor was imprisoned by his dutiful son Aurangzeb. He was not sorry at this. He exclaimed with compunction —

'I also proved a traitor to my father and God has given me the meet punishment, therefore I have nothing to repent on that score.'

Actuated by feelings of delicacy or Heaven knows what Aurangzeb did not see his father in person. The emperor demanded of his son through a man —

"Am I a prisoner now? And do you want to take my head?" With a thousand apologies Aurangzeb replied to his father's letter in the following terms —

You are past the age of political affairs. Besides, you have lost your health. Finding your other sons incompetent and worthless I take upon myself the helm of Government regardless of my taking the order of a dervish you would remain in the same condition and enjoy the same amount of honour as you have hitherto done and no body shall interfere in it. But finding it improper on your part to be in touch with state affairs lest they should prove painful to you I have made arrangements as to that."

On perusing the letter the emperor laughed a laugh of sadness. He exclaimed 'What does the

hypocrite mean by this?" "The emperor sent his man again,—

"I don't wish to speak about my other sons. They would get the throne if they have the power. But how are you going to deal with my daughter Jahanara?"

Aurangzeb wrote another letter in a modest tone,—

"As for the princess, I always regard and esteem her and I am her affectionate brother. She would stay in the Rangmahal if she care to or she might live elsewhere. Her monthly stipend would go to her regularly."

The emperor showed this letter to his beloved daughter saying,—

"Jahanara, it is not safe on your part to stay here. This devil would finish all my sons, be it Dara, Suja or Murad. True I proved a traitor to my father Jahangir Shah but I never imprisoned him nor did I tarnish my hand with the fraternal blood. When this demon has imprisoned me, he could easily murder my sons as well as their children."

With a choked voice Jahanara replied,—

"Your Majesty, pray don't utter such cruel words"

"Your stay here would mean your death. I shall be the last person to bear that. Go wherever you like,—Delhi, Lahore or elsewhere and stay there. Even if the wretched rascal does not give you anything you could live comfortably with what you have got in hand"

Having embraced father's feet with both hands Jahanara exclaimed in tears,—

'Your Majesty, don't you order me such. I for the life of me can't leave you. Who will look after you at this old age? Let Aurangzeb murder me if he chooses. I am not in the least sorry. I shall be the last person to forsake you.'

At this Shah Jahan's eyes began to stream forth. The bandis burst out crying thinking of the sad plight into which the emperor had fallen. Who could look into one's fate beforehand? The person who was the lord paramount yesterday and whom his subject loved as father to-day he is made a captive by his son. Even the stones melt at this sight. Why should not the ill-fated bandis cry then?

The loving daughter did not move an inch from her father. Aurangzeb did not turn them out only they were precluded from having any connection with the outside public. The newly-appointed commander of the fort was instructed to keep a vigilant eye towards them lest they should hold any communication with others—either verbal or written.

Virtually speaking, Aurangzeb removed his capital from Agra to Delhi. He had never lived in Agra again. On hearing Suja's advance towards Agra Aurangzeb made for Allahabad with his troops alone. He tried various means and wrote several coaxing letters to the Rajput Rulers to bring them to his party and most of them acknowledged his suzerainty though against their will as they thought that Dara had no more hopes and as the ruler of Marwar was very powerful Aurangzeb

totally forgot about the Fateyabad fight and wrote to him a very flattering letter. The Marwar chief wrote to him a letter asking him to join with him and fight against Suja. But he wrote to Suja at the sametime,—

“You just attack Aurangzeb from the front’ whereas I will attack him from behind. So that there’s no fear”

Suja could not attack Aurangzeb as arranged as but Jasobant Singh having attacked Aurangzeb from behind looted his most precious tents and immense wealth and proceeded towards Agra. Jasobanta Singh made a mint of money. He remained at Agra for several days waiting for Dara as he had asked Dara to join him there. But Dara did not come. The Marwar Raj could easily have recovered the emperor at this time, but he was far from it. With all his booty Jasobant Singh returned to his own country. Just as Aurangzeb was the root *cause of the decline of the Mogul empire*, so was Jasobanta Singh the obstacle to the establishment of the Mahomedan kingdom in India

Erelong Aurangzeb defeated his brother Suja and engaged his son to chase him before he made towards Delhi. Thus pursued, Suja went to Arracan where he is said to have been murdered with his family at the hands of the Arracan ruler. Here ended however all Aurangzeb’s troubles as far as Suja was concerned

Aurangzeb did not enter the fort. When he came to Delhi he proclaimed himself as the emperor. He had his own name engraved on the coins even though

his father was alive. Having thrown father in the back ground he became the sole sovereign of India.

His troops kept on pursuing Dara in different directions. Nowhere Dara had the courage to face them in open fight. His soldiers began to desert him gradually. It was found at last that he had scarcely a hundred soldiers left to him. Not was this all. He was robbed of all his money by dacoits. Having been unable to endure the hardship his chief Begam died. As for his Rajput wife she was compelled to go to her father's house sorely against the grain. The ill-fated Dara had become a protege of an old friend of his together with his young son. But this faithless person made over Dara to Aurangzeb's hands with the hope of becoming a millionaire by ingratiating himself with the new emperor. He also had come to Delhi.

Dara with his son was exhibited on elephant back throughout Delhi in fetters. This soul-stirring scene was too much for the people to bear. They became almost mad with anger, rage, grief and sorrow. At this time that faithless friend came to the public road at Delhi to his utter misfortune. The citizens could not bear that very sight of this wretch and so exasperated they fell upon him in a body the result was that the road was flooded with blood, the fellow would have been finished then and there had he not taken his shelter within the palace.

At this Aurangzeb became incensed. Most of the Delhi men had to pay the penalty by being trampled to

death under elephant feet. At this soul-stirring incident the citizens' hair stood on end. It did not take them long to conceive what misfortune was in store for them. During Shah Jahan's regime they enjoyed perfect peace and happiness as the country was free from war and living was very cheap, besides Shah Jahan encouraged all sorts of arts and industry having erected not a few magnificent palaces and mansions. But to have such a hypocritical emperor must have been a misfortune to them, as they had never seen such a heart-rending affair before.

Aurangzeb tried Dara in the open Durbar. His trustworthy ministers were invited. Long-bearded Moulvis of grave appearance joined the Durbar. It was decided in the Durbar that Dara was an infidel and therefore he must undergo capital punishment. The hypocrite Aurangzeb shed crocodile tears and looked extremely reluctant when he passed that death sentence upon his brother.

We won't depict this tragic picture and thus tarnish our pen any more. Some of the bitterest enemies of Dara were engaged for his murder. Lest he should be poisoned he was just preparing his food with the help of his son when those enemies made their appearance. Having seen through their motive Dara tried to defend himself with the help of the sabre in hand, but the ruffians cut off his head in a trice and ran away with it. Upon this his son dropped down on his severed body and burst

out crying in such a doleful manner that even the stones would melt at this and not to speak of men.

When Dara's head was presented before Aurangzeb he ordered it to be washed. When he satisfied himself that the head was no other than his brother's, the hypocrite wept rivers of tears in the open Durbar. The other persons present could not restrain their tears but their tears were not like those of Aurangzeb the reader must know.

When this atrocious murder came to be known cries of lamentation rose up as every one loved Dara their heart was rent asunder at Dara's death which was nothing but tragic but they dared not give an outburst of their mental grief through Aurangzeb's fear. That very day most of the houses did not cook their food but observed fasting.

The hypocrite used the following command —

Let the severed body of Dara be burnt side by side with that of his ancestor Humayun with due rites and befitting respect."

Along with Dara's burial the Mogul Empire too, went to the grave.



CHAPTER XXI.

LALI SAHIB'S MISERIES.

Misfortunes never come singly. True Lali Sahib could easily defeat Suja and so with a cheerful heart he was returning towards Agra when the news of the Fateyabad and Shamaghār arrived at his camp Jay Singh heard all the Rajput rulers had gone back to their country with a dejected heart He heard also that Dara was fugitive and that Aurangzeb had imprisoned father and had proclaimed himself as the emperor-also the Moguls had acknowledged him as such. Under the above circumstances what could he do with the aid of Lali alone ? It was proper on his part to return to country like other Rajput rulers.

Thinking all this Jay Singh deserted Soleman Shah (for that was Lali Sahib's name) and made for his own country, The Moguls that were with Lali Sahib deserted him though he tried to persuade them in various ways—infact they left him quite helpless and penniless The grand-son of the emperor Shah Jahan who rolled in luxury and happiness yesterday the same person was no better than a street beggar to-day.

When every body began to forsake Lali Sahib not even giving him a salute at the time of their departure the prince could not restrain his tears—infact his eyes began to stream forth.

punishment. It is proper therefore that you must meet your father."

"Now it is only you that are my friend and well-wisher whatever you propose I must abide."

"In Agra we have got friends—the Emperor and his daughter Jahanara. If they are actually imprisoned the Bengali Rani and Sailesh Ray—both of them would not scruple to risk their lives for us."

"Agra is now in the hands of the enemies, so I can't go there."

"No I won't. Gayamal would go to Agra and having gathered all information there would meet us at Guzrat with some money. I am told your father has gone towards Guzrat."

"Whatever you suggest we ought to follow."

"You just put off this royal dress and put on the dress of a common citizen and in that case we shall be able to get to Guzrat through the jungle imperceived by others."

Then he assured Moti that he would act according to her instructions. Now he addressed Gayamal—

"You just go to Agra. Gather every possible information and go to Guzrat with some money where you would find us."

With folded hands Gayamal replied—

"I am not inclined to part with you. I have enough of money in my hands."

Upon this Motiya addressed Gayamal—

"You are a true friend of the prince. It is you only

who have not forsaken him at this critical time He could easily trust you It is necessary for him to know what is transpiring at Agra This is a thing which no body but you can do."

Gayamal replied,—

"I am off, Your Highness Whatever I have got in hand is yours, I assure you"

With these words he brought a bag of gold coins from underneath his garment and handed it over to Moti Having kurnished the prince with profound Salaams Gayamal galloped off At this sight the prince's eyes became filled with tears He exclaimed with a choked voice,—

"There are men in this world I find every one is not a demon"

Motiya said in a sob,—

"Darling, let's go within the jungle where you must change your dress and then we must make for Guzrat just to meet your father'

Having embraced Motiya by the neck with both the hands the prince showered kisses upon her lips saying,—

"You are the only idol of my heart"

Motiya exclaimed with her eyes closed,—

"My lord, I am your devoted slave"

The person who was the commander of immense troops yesterday takes his shelter within the jungle with a common bandi now. Who can comprehend the workings of Fate ?

It was a dense forest with big *sal* trees. It was all a jungle as far as the eye could reach. No human habitation close by Lali Sahib was therefore quite safe now. He knew full well that Aurangzeb would never allow him and his father to be in the land of living and would try his utmost to cause their arrest. He must therefore be extremely cautious in all his doings and movements. Now his only hope lay in Motiya.

He knew perfectly well that Motiya loved him from the core of her heart. He knew too that Motiya was extremely intelligent. He knew too that she was bold also infact she might be called a veritable lioness. As for him he also possessed great strength in his body consequently no body could make them captives under any circumstances. What would have been his fate no body could predict if Motiya had not been his helpmate in this difficulty.

When they got into the jungle they alighted from their horses under a big tree. On letting off the horses they sat down in the cool shade of the tree. At Motiya's request Lali Sahib took off his dress and put on the dress given by Moti. Motiya who had learnt the art of simulation from Dulali metamorphosed him into a different appearance. At this the prince laughed a laugh of sorrow.

'Ah me! So much was in store for me!'

Motiya now said --

'You have become so tired. Take a little rest here while I go to the nearest village and get some food and

then we will try to proceed towards Guzrat during the night ”

We feel as if we lose all strength when our heart is broken and that was exactly the cause with the prince. He felt himself quite spent-up especially he was quite ignorant of what dejection, trouble or inactivity was

This was the first day when he became tossed by the high waves of the world No wonder then he should feel himself so much worn out.

Within that jungle he laid himself down on the grassy plain when Motiya placed his head on her own lap At this the prince exclaimed,—

“Moti, don’t you do so You will feel much trouble and inconvenience ”

With a deep sigh Motiya replied,—

“My lord, from a child I have been a slave and have been sold so many times I’m quite used to troubles from my childhood You say it would trouble me Far from it Oh ! How happy I feel myself in having placed your head on my lap ”

“Really I feel extremely pained for you” rejoined Lali Sahib

Motiya exclaimed in an emotion,—

“Prince, don’t regard me so cruel, so selfish At your present condition I feel rather rejoiced than pained The reason is not far to seek You would have been surrounded by hundreds of begums had you become the Badshah I alone, could not have the opportunity of enjoying you, but now I have got no co-sharer.”

CHAPTER XXII

GWALIOR FORT

The strong impenetrable Gwalior fort of the Mogul became converted into the prison for the Mogul princes. This fort was situated on the top of a big mountain which could easily be defended by a handful of soldiers against numberless troops. Whoever was put into this prison was never released from here. When any one became the Emperor he sent his trustworthy troops here, first of all or he brought under control the soldiers within the fort for a vast sum of money. When Jahangir's son proved a rebel against him he confined his son within this prison where he had to end his days.

Shah Jahan had no positive hatred against his brothers nor had he the necessity to send any of them to such a dreadful dungeon. His eldest brother Khurram was sent by father to this fort his second brother Parvesh was assassinated. As for his youngest brother Shariar who was Nurjahan's son-in-law he fell ill at Kashmir but succumbed while at Lahore. It was for the above reasons that the fort lay in an uncared-for condition for a long time for want of occupiers. As soon as Aurangzeb sat on the throne, he got hold of this fort, immediately on his victory at the first battle he sent poor Murad to this fort where he remained in a captive state.

Murad became unconscious through the wine mixed with poison by the bandi. In an unconscious condition he came to Gwalior on the elephant back escorted by the bandi who carried him in her arms. When he recovered his sense his tongue became parched with thirst. He looked all around in bewilderment. Thinking it was all a dream he wiped off his eyes repeatedly, but that did not remove his doubts. He found he was lying on a common bed in a certain room and could ill make out where his camp was—the camp made of the best Cashmere shawls and furnished with the finest luxuries.

Where was the sweet voice of the bandis and dancing girls! Where was the fragrance of otto and roest? In an anxious eye he looked in all sides. He found that some one was fanning him. He could not have a distinct view of things. He articulated with great difficulty,—

Give me water, my life is ebbing fast

Everyone forsook him but not the bandi. We have seen Motiya, we see this common bandi. If there is an elysium in this vale of tears, it is in the heart of a woman.

The bandi hastily brought a cup of wine and poured it into his mouth slowly. At this Murad regained some strength, his dimness disappeared and his brain seemed to have been a little cooled. He exclaimed,—

“Another cup, please”

The bandi complied with Murad's wishes. After

he had taken the cup Murad could sit up. With a look of surprise all around he burst forth,—

"Who are you?"

Your slave Jumela bandi."

"Where am I?

Your Highness in the Gwallor fort!"

'In the Gwallor fort! Eh! with these words he gave a big jump. For a while he could not comprehend anything. It seemed as if his brain fired up. He became mad. Having given the bandi a smart kick he thundered forth—

A lie—a sheer lie. The bandi lay prostrate on the ground for sometime as the effect of the kick she had not the power to get up. Murad hurried off from the spot and went outside.

There were two chambers on the side with little furniture. After that a little garden surrounded by high walls with a little door on one side. The prince found that a sentry was on duty with a gun just at that door.

Finding him advancing that way the sentry said in a grave tone—

Prince, please pardon my insolence, I am ordered to shoot you dead only if you come this way'

As soon as Murad heard this undreamt of order he kept standing there quite bewildered. It seemed to him a deep darkness enveloped the whole atmosphere. It seemed also that the earth was gradually moving from underneath his feet. But he had taken two cups

of wine, so that the blood within his veins began to warm up. Having controlled himself a little he questioned rather in a solemn tone,—

“Do you know who I am ?”

“You are Prince Murad who does not know ?” was the modest reply

“No longer a prince but the Emperor since the victory,” thundered forth Murad

“You are a captive of His Majesty”

“Captive ! Is it Dara then who has won the victory ?” exclaimed Murad in extreme surprise,

“Far from it Dara is a runaway now”

“Then who is so audacious as to imprison me ?”

“It is under His Imperial Majesty Aurangzeb’s command that you are made a captive.”

“Really ! His Majesty Aurangzeb”

“Yes, Emperor-Shah Jahan has been dethroned and imprisoned in Agra His Majesty Aurangzeb has been proclaimed the Emperor”

“We have been ordered to see to your comforts as far as possible but don’t you come further on, for in that case you shall be shot down”

Whatever Murad had heard came upon him like a bolt from the blue He kept standing there mute for a while He never dreamt that a man could be such a hypocrite, traitor or a demon As for him, he had a very large heart and so he did not know what duplicity was and so his brother’s cruelty and roguery were too

much for him. Infact he sank within himself. Without uttering a syllable he retraced his steps.

On entering the room he found the bandi seated in a corner. He also found her head was bleeding profusely. At this his eyes became filled with tears. On stepping up to the bandi he addressed her —

"I have committed a wrong act for which I want to be excused. Now I understand everyone has forsaken me save and except you."

Having sat close to her he took his hands in his at which the bandi's eyes began to stream forth. She said in a choked voice —

"Prince another person in your position would have run mad. Why should I get angry?"

Having taken the bandi on his breast Murad gave her repeated kisses. She remained there in a listless manner. A little while after Murad brought some water with which he washed her ulcer and then heard from her everything in detail. Upon this he exclaimed —

"I never knew a person could be so cruel so hypocritical so mean minded and so much given to lying."

"Should I stay here Aurangzeb would surely take my life through poison or through the executioner's hands and so I must run away from this place by any means whatever. How have they arranged to prevent my flight?"

"As far as I understand they have ordered a very strict watch."

After a pause Murad looked towards the bandi and demanded,—

“Do you love me?”

At this the bandi's face reddened. She replied with down-cast looks,—

“I am but a slave of yours”

Women are more intelligent than men. You must see that I could safely fly away from here, what do you advise me to do?”

The bandi controlled her mental workings.

She had loved Murad from the core of her heart. But he had not thought of her even for a moment. He was anxious to leave this place without thinking of her future fate. At this the bandi's heart sank within her. Her eyes became almost filled with tears. With the greatest difficulty she controlled her passions and exclaimed in an half-articulated tone,—

“Prince, I will try to do for you as much as lies in my power.”

The prince replied in an emotion,—

“I don't care to sit on the throne. I mean to teach this human demon some sharp lesson, otherwise I shan't have peace even after my death”

After a slight pause Murad added,—

“Here I can't eat anything except gram, because they would try to mix poison with my food. I must fly from this place to-night”

But the desires of the ill fated Murad did not have their fulfilment. At night he tried to run away, but

vain as he was caught red handed. Then the sentinels tied him in fetters put him on elephant back and sent him over to the new emperor at Delhi.

The bandi had helped Morad in his flight in fact she tried to run away with him and therefore her execution was the meet reward. Having confined her in the prison the commander of the fort sent for the executioner through his men. Her head would be severed from her body before the troops in an open space, at which the bandi was not in the least afraid or agitated. He knew she could take her own life at any moment with the poison she had in her possession.

The troops took their stand in rows. In the centre a big wooden post was placed the executioner was ready with a sharp sabre in hand. On horse back the commander was moving to and fro. The sentry had gone to bring the bandi from the prison. In these days an event like that was of daily occurrence. So that there was no cause of fear or grief or consternation with any body. The bandi did not come alive but lo and behold her dead body. She had poisoned herself and thus taken her own life only to get rid of the executioner's hands. In those days we find no woman but kept some poison with her. The commander became mad with rage. Finding his desires were not fulfilled he ordered —

Throw down the body of this wicked woman from the fort and let it be devoured by jackals and dogs. The order was carried out to the very letter but it

did not affect the bandī in the least She went to Heaven full of the beerless love for the prince If true love secures us our desired thing in the next birth, then the bandī must have secured Murad ere long. This was a fact with which the reader of Indian history is familiar As for Aurangzeb's hair-standing deeds, we won't tarnish our pen with these Like Dara, Murad also had the same fate He was taken round public roads of the town fettered on elephant back. His case was also tried Execution was the final fate for him also Having washed the Imperial throne with fraternal blood the infernal rascal sat on the throne but with that wretched Aurangzeb the Mogul empire had come to an end—Mogul empire was washed away by the flood of fraternal blood

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ILL FATED LALL.

Owing to extreme exhaustion Lali Sahib fell-asleep in the cool shade of the tree with his head on Motiya's knee. Had there been no sleep in the world, people would have turned mad. The grief-dispelling peace-giving sleep embraced the poor ill-fated Lali Sahib who had been bereft of parents and friends, kinsmen and relations.

Extensive forest with sal trees as far as the eye could reach with various other big trees. The birds had taken their shelter within the leaves of trees just to protect themselves from the scorching heat outside. They too were taking rest silently. The beasts of prey had retired to their respective places. The whole forest was full of solemn silence. There was no human habitation close by so that this was quite a safe place for Lali Sahib.

With steadfast eyes Motiya was looking at Lali Sahib's face. Happy she was and also not. Had the prince been the emperor she could not have enjoyed his company in such a way. It was therefore she had the fullest satisfaction in that respect. Why was not the prince born in a poor family instead in the royal family for in that case she could have ended her days in perfect happiness within this dense forest?

No, that was impossible—He was a Mogul prince. He had many onerous duties to perform. These he could not neglect for the sake of a simple bandi who also would not like that He had to join his father in Guzrat and had to fight against the roguish Aurangzeb

She was revolving within her mind various things when she heard some foot-steps behind. She looked towards that, startled, so much so that all her life's blood became like water in a moment. She noticed that a big tiger was aiming at them from a distance wagging his long tail slowly His eyes emitted, as it were, sparks of fire from within

Danger upon danger Had they no peace anywhere? In a trice Motiya placed the prince's head on the ground with care and took in hand the revolver lying besides her

Having sat on her knees she aimed at the tiger—a thing which took the intruder by surprise He retrced a few steps back and made himself ready to give a big leap

After that the solitary forest shook as it were, with the sound of the gun fire There was echo all over. The birds spoke out, and then what happened Motiya had not the least idea. It seemed to her that she was thrown off by some supernatural power, but immediately after she got up and what she had seen after that—that was enough to make her still as stone. She kept standing for a while like a wooden figure.

Having received the shot at Motiya's hands, the tiger fell upon her and the result was she was thrown off at a distance. Then the tiger turned his attention towards the prince upon whom he fell. Motiya could not see clearly what the prince or the tiger was doing. But finding her darling coming to such a grief he lost herself. Having drawn the sharp sword from her waist she fell upon the tiger and drove it right into his body. The tiger fell flat on his back. She pierced the animal a second time at which her whole body became red with blood. Infact she had become a tigress with the tiger. It seemed as if the Turkish blood became converted into lightning.

The prince rose, to his feet and exclaimed —

A dreadful tiger indeed ! Where has it come from ?" I had fallen asleep."

Motiya replied gasping —

"You are not hurt I hope."

What's all this ? Is it God's will to put us into difficulty again and again ?

It is all over with him I expect,

Long ago He was finished when he had fallen upon me otherwise he would have finished me.

"I shot him with this pistol"

'I find his Head has been rent asunder I have killed several tigers in my life. It is a pity you spoilt the whole game also that you did not wake me up"

There was no time for it. The tiger was trying to give a leap I hit him in the nick of time.'

"That was enough. You drove the weapon unnecessary and have thus besmeared yourself with blood. You are fit for becoming the empress of Delhi. You could have out—Nurjahanned Nurjahan, but God wills it otherwise."

"I don't aspire to become the empress" is the modest reply.

"It is now for you to wash yourself"

"But where is the water to be got from?"

"Yonder there is a small river. Come let us go there and wash ourselves"

Holding the bridle of the horses both of them went towards the river. Lali Sahib said in a laugh,—

"A pity—indeed Nobody saw you bagging the tiger. Greater pity that we have to leave the animal behind."

Motiya said rather amused,—

"As you are the only idol of my worship, I'm glad that I could show you the prey."

Having raised motiya's bright face Lali Sahib kissed it saying,—

"I'm not worthy of the love you entertain towards me. Both of them were steeped in peerless love, little aware of the dreadful demon that was going to put them into its ruthless jaws

Through the forest the small rivulet was flowing making a gurgling noise. The sandy white bed over which the transparent current of water flowed looked like crystal. The horses which became thirsty were let off. They began to drink water to their heart's content.

The prince with his darling washed their face and hands. Both of them wiped off each other's face out of affection—a pleasure not to be found even in the Rangmahal of Agra.

It was close upon evening The birds from different quarters were taking shelter, on the trees and so the whole forest sounded with the warbling of the birds.

Washing over Motiya said—

'My lord we ought not to go out at day time as the enemy is all around. So we must start for Guzrat during the night.

"I accept your sound advice.'

We must not tarry here, let us start at once. As for food we will have it on the way"

With a deep sigh Lali Sahib replied—

I have no appetite.'

"Your first duty is to look to your health you must remember

Right-ho. Let's start then."

Both of them mounted their horses and started. The overhead sky was lit with numberless stars. Beautiful scenery yonder extensive plain as far as the eye could reach over which nice cool breeze was blowing to one's delight and cheerfulness. Overwhelmed as solemn Lali Sahib was with various anxieties he found some solace in this nature's tranquility over and above, Motiya idol of his worship was his companion whose genuine love was sprinkling water as it were, into his very heart. Even in this difficulty he felt an ineffable

joy—a joy he never enjoyed before. It was a wonder, however, why the great Disposer of events had not granted him any happiness, who could account for this but He !

Day after day rolled on. Through the irony of fate the Emperor's grandson went on from one end of India to another, in company with a common bandi. Like a street beggar the poor ill-fated young man called at a shop and took some food and then wended on his journey again. At day time he concealed himself in a jungle. Was the prince happy with his present condition ? Certainly not. But happy was Motiya as she had the idol of her heart with her.

They had advanced a good distance when one day Lali Sahib demanded,

“ Will you promise me one thing !”

“ Whatever you would order, my darling, I will execute with all my heart even at the risk of my life,” was the reply

“ I am under the belief my father is not alive.” observed Lali Sahib in a very sad tone.

“ Prince, don't you take such a thing on the tongue.” exclaimed Motiya.

“ Motiya, what's the good of consoling the mind by concealing the real fact ! I'm inclined to believe I shall be imprisoned and be sent to the Gwalior fort. It is very probable my younger brother has already been sent there , you have little idea what takes place there.

There one is poisoned to death and no body under the sun gets the scent of it.'

At this motiya shuddered She burst forth —

"My lord, why do you tell me all this and thus wound me? As long as there's a spark of life in me, no body shall sever our connection not even our Creator

CHAPTER XXIV.

LAST PROMISE.

Lali Sahib's eyes became filled with tears. He turned his face away. For a long time he could not speak. Motiya's heart beat with force. She tried hard to control these emotions working within her. She knew that her lord's life was not in safety even for a moment, but she did not allow this dreadful thing surging up on her breast ; she endeavoured to fortify her mind, but she was only a weak girl.

After a pause Lali Sahib observed,—

“To-morrow we arrive at the capital of a small ruler for whom father did much. I am under the belief he would prove a true friend in this dire hour of need. It is, therefore, I have decided to take shelter under his roof.”

“Be pleased to pardon my impertinence. At this juncture you ought to join your father as soon as possible without thinking of any thing else.” was the modest reply.

“I have seen in a dream—my father is no more” replied the prince with a broken heart

“Why—why do you say such a thing, pray ?”

“I am speaking nothing but truth. What's the ~~ool~~ of suppressing the truth ? My father is not in the

land of the living and so there's no other alternative than to look upon that man.'

But what guarantee is there that he is a trustworthy man?

His gratitude is the only guarantee. Should he prove faithless now and cause my arrest, you must know there is no human being in this world as they have all been converted into demons. Should it be the case, what's the use living in such a place—a vale of tears?"

'Prince, I am inclined to believe that such an act on your part would be only committing yourself.'

But there is no help for it. How long shall I be roaming about in this manner? It is therefore that I make a request'

'Please order. This slave of yours would carry out your orders always.'

Should this man really prove a traitor—should I be sent to Aurangzeb as a captive, swear you won't forsake me."

My lord does it require any written pledge?

'In case I should be made a captive, they would never allow you to stay with me.'

"I will see to that. You need not bother yourself over that" was the vehement reply

The prince said in a tone of despair ———

"Should this be my fate—I don't say it must be—swear you must see me one day at the Tajmahal any how when both of us go near the tomb of our lamented

grandmother and "offer our heartfelt prayer before our Creator"

"Prince, if it be so in His dispensation, I swear to that"

Both of them trudged on silently Dawn was about to peep in and the morning breeze began to blow slowly The bats were returning to their shelter with the food they gathered during the night.

The prince replied,—abruptly,—

"Moti, you are right I am inviting all these misgivings for nothing Can man be so ungrateful? It is father who helped this man to rise in such an eminence. Whatever he is now is all due to father Under the circumstances it is impossible, nay, absurd, to suspect his character now"

Motiya spoke not a word. She was a pessimist all along She has been a slave from a child and so her experiences were far greater than those of the prince Her mind told her that the prince ought not to think of this man, but she never questioned his actions, so she forbade him not Only she accompanied him in silence

In front there was a small hill over which there was a small fort Beneath this a small town or either a village Early in the morning both the prince and Moti appeared at the gate of the fort. The state of his mind then could not be described

To-day was the turning point of his life. But he was helpless How long would he remain under such

misgivings. Some other thing was preferable to this suspense. With a heaving heart he entered the Fort. Motiya's heart beat so heavily that she had to press it down. She felt clearly that no happiness was in store for her.

When the prince sent word the host accorded him a most cordial reception and made special arrangements for his meals. This gave Motiya some relief but her mind was not free from suspicion and so she did not move an inch from the prince. The host's men tried to keep her apart from the prince but in vain.

Both the prince and Motiya retired at night. As for the prince, he fell asleep on this impression that he had secured a shelter after all but Motiya did not have a wink of sleep. Having placed her hand on the sword in her waist she kept a vigil sitting but sleep is a thing over which we have little control. She fell asleep after all but when she did not know

All on a sudden her sleep broke. She got startled. She tried to sit up, but she had not the power to do so. She had been bound hand and foot. Outright about a score of armed men entered the room with lights in their hands. Motiya noticed through the light that the prince, too, lay on the ground with his hand and feet tied.

Motiya tried hard to snap the string but in vain. She also found that her sword had been snatched away from her. Infact both of them were confined.

It was quite useless on her part to exert any strength under the circumstances , it only remained for her to use some tact to extricate themselves. She spoke not a word. There was no other alternative than to suppress her rancour. She only watched silently what their fate was like to be

At this stage the chief of the sentinels advanced up saying,—

“ Prince, our ruler has been compelled to make you a captive ”

Even in this sad plight the prince did not forget himself The imperial spirit increased hundred-fold. Without being agitated in the least he exclaimed,—

“ What for ! under whose orders, pray ! ”

The sentry replied,—

“ At the command of the Emperor. Probably you are not aware both your father and uncle have received the death penalty. All the rulers have acknowledged Aurangzeb as the emperor. The old emperor had been imprisoned within the Agra fort. Aurangzeb has proclaimed himself as the Emperor at Dehli. The lord of this fort is an insignificant person and so he cannot dare to enter into a quarrel with the new emperor ; it is for the above reasons he is bound to obey the command of the emperor.”

“ Well he has done. This is indeed, the highest reward for gratitude However, when my father has received death penalty, I am also prepared for it The Mogul prince is never afraid of death But prithee

what has my companion done to him that she has been confined also?" demanded the prince.

"Your companion has been confined lest she should create any disturbance. The Badshah has not issued any command concerning her we must admit."

"Then she had better be let off. Where would you send me to?"

To His Majesty at Dehli."

"Let me be with her till then"

No I can't allow that but we must let her off"

"She might go along with your elephant if she choose. She would get back her horse."

"Prince, don't be anxious about me. I won't forsake you. Even God can not separate us" said Motiya.

"Our ruler has heard your companion is a woman so she might be allowed to go in a palanquin or on the elephant back" replied the sentry in a modest tone.

"Be myself a man or a woman I am much obliged to your worthy ruler. Tell your wretched ruler that I am the last person to solicit any favour from a treacherous person like him" broke forth Motiya in an emotion.

Without giving a reply to Motiya's words the sentinels led the prince away. At the time of departure the prince reminded Motiya of her promise. At this Motiya replied in a choked voice—

"If I have an implicit faith in God we must meet at the Tajmahal. Be not anxious on my account, pray."

The prince repeated his request. Motiya returned,—
“The world might come to an end, but Motiya’s words know no violation.”

The prince was taken away and so Motiya was left behind. She tried to snap the rope once move but in vain. Then she burst out saying. Her firmness of mind was all gone. She began to cry like a child. The emotions of her mind and heart were all was led away by her tears. To-day her heart was entirely broken with the prince’s loss. Motiya lost herself. Her happy dream was all broken.

CHAPTER XXV

AURANGZEB'S ROGUERY

At the time when Prince Soleiman shah was being taken to Aurangzeb in fetters, he understood that there was not the least hope of his life and that he must be victimised like his father by Aurangzeb's cruel hands. The faithless ruler easily parted with him but his men were not so base, they accorded to the grandson of the late emperor the best possible care and attention. Though he passed along the road on elephant back in fetters, thanks to their care and attention he had no troubles incidental to the journey.

They allowed Motiya to go along with the prince, at times they allowed her to go in the same howdah with the prince. At this time both the prince and Motiya lost themselves through the eastacy felt. But they knew perfectly that their happy days had come to an end. They were making themselves ready for death of which they were not afraid in the least. Motiya used to say—

Darling there's no happiness on this side of the grave on our death we will meet in heaven where no body would be able to separate us from each other'

Lali Sahib observed—

It mortifies me to think that I cannot die fighting

in the battle field. It is a thousand pities, I have to die in the excutioner's hands.—

Having restrained her tears Motiya said with the greatest difficulty—

My lord, this shall never be your fate. It is only for you to go to the Tajmahal any how. I will also try my utmost that you could ; remember that we are not helpless. We have got several friends in Agra.

The prince replied with a deep sigh,—

"Yes, I know, Sailesh Ray would do much for me even at the risk of his life, I know, too, that Gul should she be in the land of the living, would also do her utmost for me. And as for Dulali, if she is still in Agra, she would be of great help to me. Besides these three, I don't think there is any other person who would prove a friend to us in this difficulty. Gayamal would help us now. He has money which commands many things" returned Motiya,"

"Yes you are right He won't forsake us."

When the sentinels kindly permitted Motiya to go on the prince's howdah, the Prince and Motiya used to hold conversation which knew no ends. That conversation cost tears only. Who could dream that such a cruel fate would befall the ever be-loved grandson of the Emperor ? Perhaps he would run mad if the sweet nector of Motiya's were not spinkled into his heart "

"Motiya's sweet words and simple nature as well as

peerless love captivated the sentinels. They felt too much for the prince and became charmed with Motiya's behaviour—so much so that they allowed them to live together—an act never permissible under the circumstances.

The sentinels did not keep such a vigilant eye upon them. Taking advantage of this Motiya whispered into the prince's ear one day—

"We could now flee away from this place."

Impossible. We shall be caught. The result will be that I shall be deprived of the happiness I am enjoying in my last days—they would not allow you to stay with me. My father has gone so also my mother and brother together with all my kinsmen and friends. What's the good of living this miserable life then?

Prince, don't you utter this on the tongue. My hopes are not gone yet. The All-merciful Ruler won't be so cruel to us. Please don't forget about the proposal regarding the Taj" replied Motiya in a choked voice.

The prince returned in a tone of sadness—

"Don't forget about your promise. That's my last hope and happiness. Should Aurangzeb give me death penalty I will crave his permission in the open Durbar for my last prayer before my grand mother's tomb. I am sure he won't refuse my request at least for delicacy's sake. And should he send me to the Gwalior fort I would also supplicate this prayer also."

"Should the wretched rascal reject your prayer, I will help you. Surely the Badshah won't accompany you. Is there any thing money cannot command I will win over the sentinels either by hook or by crook, and that shall fulfill our purpose We will both go to the Taj."

The prince repeated rather in a sad tone,—

"That would be my last happiness."

The elephant was going on and on, Agra was only a day's journey now.

At mid-day the sentinels were making arrangements for their meals at a certain place where numberless Mogul soldiers came Aurangzeb sent these trustworthy men in order to escort the prince.

Having made over Soleman Shah to the commander the sentinels returned to their century. Now the Mogul took the prince tied 'hands and feet. The sentinels had accorded the prince greatest care and attention but this happiness was lost to him while in charge of the Moguls. These persons who considered themselves fortunate in kissing his feet a month ago to-day they dealt with him like a common prisoner. Lali Sahib was about to burst into tears but he controlled himself with great difficulty thinking that it would be extremely improper to show his weakness before these men

This was the first day Lali Sahib had heard about Aurangzeb's absence from Dehli. He had pitched his camp close to Agra whence he would proceed towards the Deccan shortly.

This news cheered up Lali Sahib to some extent. In the far-off Delhi he had no friends besides it would be next to impossible for him to come to the Taj from that place whereas his visit to the Taj might be feasible from his stay here.

The arrival of the Moguls created a great sensation all over Motya could no longer be seen. Now the Moguls took the prince towards Agra. From elephant back the prince looked on anxiously for Motiya all around but in vain. At a distance the Imperial Cavalry were returning to their country with no other human beings on the way. There was nothing more to be seen than extensive plain as far as the eye could reach. With a deep sigh Lali Sahib exclaimed —

“No no she would never forsake me.”

At one time the Dehli people went mad for the prince Dara. The Crafty Aurangzeb was afraid that a riot might take place owing to Lali Sahib. Therefore he had left Dehli and pitched his camp near Agra. As regards Soleiman Shah Aurangzeb thought it wise to hold his trial in a camp far from Delhi or Agra. Therefore the prince was arrested now and as soon as the news of his arrest came to the notice of the Emperor he left Dehli. Nor did he have the courage to enter Agra. Both the Delhi and Agra people loved Dara and his son dearly. And no body could say how matters would stand when the Agra people would find Lali Sahib gyved.

That day the Moguls did not go to the Imperial

camp, but sojourned during the night at a certain place on the way. About five hundred Mogul warriors kept the vigil surrounding the prince with arms in their hands. There was not the ghost of a chance for the prince's flight. They did not have a wink of sleep during the night. Under the circumstances it was impossible for the prince to have sleep at all. He was not afraid of death, but he had the keen longing to see Motiya and to embrace her for a minute before death. Will not the all merciful Ruler grant him this little bit of happiness?

The prince became sorely anxious for Motiya. What could be the earthly reason, she left him all on a sudden? No, she could never forsake him. What a question!

In this dire difficulty Motiya was his only friend and companion, infact he never felt his troubles keenly in as much as she had been with him so long. To his utter misfortune he was deprived of her at last. For want of sleep at night his face became paler a hundred times. Any body having a look at him in the morning could not restrain his tears. The Mogul princes, as a class, were extremely handsome and more so our ill-fated Lali Sahib, but during the last few days his appearance had undergone a thorough change. Even the stones would melt at his appearance now.

Early the following morning the Moguls asked the prince to mount the Howdah again. When he did so, they advanced towards Agra shouting all the way for-

triumphant victory When it was close upon 8 o'clock they came near the emperor's camp which might be called a little town as about fifty thousands soldiers were gathered there. The camp consisted of number less beautiful tents with the emperor's tent in the centre where the crescent-like big Imperial flag began to flutter with the current of air

The Mogul warriors were wandering to and fro, Hundreds of Amirs and Omraos were gathered round the emperor Long bearded Mollas and Moulvis with white cloak on were strutting on all around with an imperial gait. It was time for them to show their power and influence. Now they had become the all in all to the Mogul Durbar Islamic bigotry and hypocrisy were in the extreme Having been unable to become at one with another the Rajput chiefs and rulers left the Mogul Darbar and had gone to their country But what terrible persecutions and sad plight the descendant of their race was under—these they had the least idea of.

CHAPTER XXVI

AURANGZEB'S URBANITY

The fettered beloved grandson of the emperor Shah Jahan was exhibited in all the Mogul camps like a thief during his life time. For about an hour the Moguls took Lali Sahib round to the universal discontent of all. Many turned their faces away from this painful sight. Whereas several of them gave him the wonted salaams with a kiss on the ground. A solemn silence prevailed throughout the camp. No body felt delighted at this inhuman act with the exception of a few men who were Dara's enemies and who shouted cries of victory ; but their voice was also drowned into this sorrowful scene

But the prince was quite unmoved. With the frightful imminent death before him he was not in the least agitated. Deep firmness was traceable in his countenance. His handsome features depicted a unique gravity. For about an hour he was exhibited in the camp like a thief , but no body found the muscles of his face distorted a bit. This aroused great respect and honour in the minds of the public. But no body had the boldness enough to question the felonious emperor's actions.

Aurangzeb was seated in the Imperial tent holding his Darbar where all his ministers were assembled

together. The Mollas made themselves conspicuous by their presence. Behind him the gaudily-dressed mace-bearers kept standing with gold jewelled maces in their hands whereas in front numberless Mogul warriors with drawn swords in their hands were in evidence. The serenity and solemnity of the sight made one lost in wonder and admiration.

Dressed in common white Aurangzeb was seated like a poor Dervish in contrast with the pomp and pageantry on the occasion. No body would find him to be the emperor of Delhi he was looking like an ordinary Molla.

At this stage the prince surrounded by the sentry was presented before the emperor in fetters. With not a drooping head he appeared before the emperor in hauteur. His looks cost many a person rivers of tears.

With no end of surprise the emperor ejaculated —

What's this Eh! who the deuce on-earth is so audacious as to bring our beloved nephew to such a painful grief? Unfetter him at once. Sharp.

How great was the surprise and astonishment at the words of the emperor! For a short while they did not dare doing any thing. At this the emperor said in an angry tone,—

Put off his fetters at once."

Outright the sentry took off the fetters from the prince's hands and feet. Then the emperor addressed the prince —

"In the eyes of my ministers your father was considered to have been an infidel and so I was obliged for duty's sake to issue the death penalty upon him though with an extremely sorrowful heart—a fact every body is aware of. Even now I am smarting under the grief of my beloved brother's loss"

With a solemn tone Lali Sahib demanded,—

"What penalty upon me, pray?"

Extremely surprised the Badshah exclaimed,—

"What a question! you are only a lad, offence on your part! you shall get your due stipend from the state. You are the beloved grandson of my revered father and so you would receive the honour befitting your rank"

"Where am I to stay?"

"My boy, political affairs are a heavy responsibility and family dissension would lead to the decline of the Mogul Empire. Just see what a sad plight the Hindus have come to simply owing to family quarrel. Surely you would not like the down-fall of our Empire."

"No, never."

"You speak befitting the dynasty you come from. There's no chance of the family quarrel coming to an end unless you keep yourselves aloof from the Darbar. Therefore I would like to see that all of you live far away from the court for some time."

"Where do you command me to go to?"

"As for your brother, I have with due respect and honour sent him over to the Gwalior fort where he is

passing his days quite happily You just go there and join him and live happily ”

“I’m too well aware what’s one’s fate in the Gwalior fort. I prefer execution to death by poison. Prithee command my execution.”

Having blocked his ear holes Aurangzeb ejaculated—

‘For shame! For shame! Don’t you take this on the tongue. Should any body fail to accord you the due respect and honour execution would be his fate then and there. I am but a common Dervish. Don’t you ever dream that such an in human action would take place under my regime.’

It is impossible for me to disobey your command. I have therefore to go to the Gwalior fort where I must stay as a prisoner till my death replied Lal Sahib.

“Fie! Fie! don’t you ever dream of such a thing” exclaimed Aurangzeb again Without heeding the emperor’s words the prince rejoined—

May I just see my grandfather?’

“I ought always to see that no trouble or inconvenience befalls my revered father. He is ill, nay laid up and so no political affairs should go into his ear or I would have sent you over to him with the greatest alacrity’

Have I to go to Gwalior this very day?”

My boy you ought not to stay here even for a day Your father has several enemies, and I don’t wish to put you into a difficulty, even for a moment.”

"I have a last prayer to make before your Majesty"

"Tell me what it is I'll grant it with the greatest pleasure"

"I know I shall never return from Gwalior I entertain a keen desire to offer my prayer before my grand mother's tomb on the eve of my departure for Gwalior. Can I expect to get this permission?"

At this Aurangzeb assumed a grave appearance He began to look at the prince's face with steadfast eyes. Was there any secret motive in the looked-for visit to the Taj Both he and his father had been at Agra for a long time They were extremely popular there Even now the old emperor and his daughter had been confined in the Agra fort. Under the circumstances it was not safe to grant Soleiman Shah permission to go there

Finding Aurangzeb wavering Lali Sahib added,—

"I have no other intention than to go there for offering my heart-felt prayers. I presume you could believe in the words of the Mogul prince"

Aurangzeb observed,—

"Certainly I can, what a question! But I fear your visit to Agra might put you to some danger —"

Lali Sahib returned,—

"Your sentry would be with me all along. I go there in their custody I could go there even at night if your Majesty consent to, so that no body would come to know about my visit there"

"A serious question indeed! I can't give my con-

sent at once. You mean to go there with the sole object of prayer in our revered mother's tomb. I have not the least doubt as to this. It gives me but to think of this pleasure. But I must consider whether it behoves you to go there at all. I am responsible for your life now that your father is no more. Take rest now I must consult with my ministers before I express my opinion on this matter"

"I have got another petition before your Majesty"

Tell me—do tell me, I am always anxious to fulfil your desires.'

I won't eat any food here that would come through your men. Poison is so easily available here.

Aurangzeb said in a taunt—

"A silly urchin. For shame. Don't you utter this on the tongue. Your food shall come to you through the person in whom you could safely confide.

Lali Sahib replied,—

"I appointed one Gayamal as purveyor to my troops. If he is ordered to prepare my food I could take it otherwise I would prefer death by starvation. I am the last person to touch any food here, I warrant your Majesty."

A minister interrupted saying—

"Your Majesty having been pleased with Gayamal's work has appointed him as chief purveyor

Aurangzeb observed—

"Yes, I recollect now. He is a good man."

Every one exclaimed in one voice,—

"Yes, he is a really trustworthy man.

Thanks to Lali Sahib, Gayamal was no longer a poor grocer now. During the space of a few months he had made a mint of money. Having been appointed as purveyor to the emperor he had become a second Rothschild. A man in the Imperial Court might become a millionaire or a street beggar in a single day. Having forsaken Lali Sahib Gayamal did not sit idle. The purses belonging to the Mollas, Moulvis and ministers were filled with Gayamal's money. It was due to their favour that he had become the chief purveyor. His influence knew no bounds. There were very few persons in the Mogul Darbar who were above corruption.

One of the ministers interrupted,—

"Your Majesty ! It was this Gayamal who gave the information of the prince's flight and the prince would not have been arrested but for him "

When the terrible news reached the ears of the prince, he became thunder struck, as it were. Gayamal had proved a traitor ! We ought to efface the word 'confidence' from our mind altogether."

For a while the prince kept standing mute and then ejaculated,—

"I have tested his trust-worthiness all along. Even now I trust him. This much he would do, sure as fate he won't give me poison "

"We also believe him quite a competent man "

Then Aurangzeb addressed Lali Sahib,—My

boy I comply with your request. You shall get your food through him. Go and have rest. All arrangements will be made for your departure for Gwalior to-night. Now go was the reply.

The prince said not a word. He left with the same composure of mind with which he had appeared.

Aurangzeb said to himself —

'There's no believing this lion's cub. It is imperative that he must be despatched to Gwalior as soon as possible. My Government has not fully been established nor have the impious Rajputs been humiliated yet. Even now they might create some disturbance for him.'

The emperor dispersed the meeting and left for his bath room with an anxious heart.

CHAPTER XXVII

AMIDST THE ENEMY.

Lali Sahib was no longer in fetters now. Every one was showing him honour at least outwardly. But the prince was practically confined though disengaged from the chain. With arms in their hands Aurangzeb's men had all surrounded him.

They brought him to a rather beautiful tent which was furnished in a way. The prince found that this tent was patrolled by numberless sentinels. There was not the iota of a chance for his flight nor did the prince entertain this desire as everything was lost to him. And what was the good of fleeing under the circumstances? Now the artful Aurangzeb was showing him civility at least superficially, but should the prince be caught in the act of flying, Aurangzeb would order him to be killed under the feet of the elephant. While talking with the emperor the prince concealed the feelings working within him but when he entered his tent he lost all his strength and energy, it seemed as if his heart was broken, he sat silent for a while in a despondent mood. The only solace was that no villain entered his camp and broke his peace of mind thus causing him trouble. There was no knowing

when he would die or rather be murdered. He exclaimed within himself in an anxious tone,—

"My Moti where are you at this time?" With all the affection shown by the emperor the prince was not wheedled by the wily hypocrite. But he understood this also that the emperor would not order his murder openly. He was almost sure that he would lose his life as soon as he would set foot on the Gwalior soil. Was it possible for the pen to depict the feelings which surged up in his mind under such circumstances?

He exclaimed again,—

Moti where are you now?"

On hearing some footsteps he got startled up with a big leap. Fortunately it was not the executioner but a porter carrying some eatables on the head. He was followed by Gayamal.

Gayamal gave salaams with due respect and spoke out—

At the command of the emperor I have brought some fruits and sundries for you. This porter is my man whom I can fully trust and so can you. From to-day he will be your valet. The emperor has order such."

Having stepped up to the prince Gayamal said in a low tone—

"The servant won't prove a traitor I assure you. It is you who has brought this poor insignificant man to such a position."

The prince replied in a similar soft tone—

"I hear it is you who has been instrumental in causing my arrest."

"A sheer lie, I have won over several persons in the Darbar with money. Don't for Heaven's sake make any objection to your going to Gwalior. Remember you are not helpless. Here I can't speak to you any more"

Then Gayamal addressed the servant rather loudly,—

"Ramdin, the Bhisti will bring water to the bath room. You just make our prince's bath ready. I'm off"

With these words Gayamal left the tent in quick steps. Then the prince turned his eyes towards the eatables brought for him, he found the porter has just put down the tray which contained the fruits. He looked like a common up-country cooli and wore a beard which was covered by his turban. Coolies like him were engaged on various works in the Imperial camp. There name was legion so the prince did not take any notice of him. He only took a fruit in his hand just to see if it contained any poison or not. At this the porter whispered into his ear,—

"Don't be afraid"—

The prince gave a big jump. He ejaculated with a choked voice,—

"Moti—is it you, Moti, Eh!"

Moti returned,—

"Silence! The slave is always at your feet. You

could come to know everything Just take your bath and have some food."

Lali Sahib replied in a sad tone -

Food ! food to think of now ?

Moti rejoined in a low tone,—

' I shall feel wounded if you don't take any food. You can fully understand I can't speak out here. Should I be detected the dogs shall devour me and so I can't save you."

Holding Moti by the hand the prince replied in a soft tone,—

"There is nothing to be grieved at only pity that I can't make you happy "

Motiya spoke not a word Having arranged the fruits for the prince she brought out perfumed oil and having placed her fingers on the lips she beckoned to him not to speak and then she began to besmear his body with the oil.

Gayamal called at the tent again unaccompanied by another man who had brought clothes for the prince

Lali Sahib observed —

"Clothing also contains poison. It is a fact not unknown to the Mogul Durbar"

Gayamal spoke not a word Now he dismissed the man and having identified Motiya to the prince he left the place again

Motiya whispered into the prince's ear —

Only one under the sun has not proved a traitor yet.

At this the prince heaved a deep sigh, but spoke nothing. It would be impossible for any one to talk under the circumstances.

Now Motiya took the prince to the bath room and helped him in his bath. His eyes became filled with tears and he gave her a kiss in silence. Both these lives were at death's door. Oh! how dreadful affair! What peerless love! How many persons could possibly comprehend this?

Motiya forced the prince to eat something. Then she withdrew with the wet clothes as well as with the eatables left by the prince. While leaving she whispered again,—

“I will call in the evening again”

With Motiya's departure the prince felt himself, plunged into a sea of despondency as if his heart and soul sank within him.

For a long while the prince sat still. As time advanced, he understood that Aurangzeb had not the desire to finish him here. If it were so, he would have been finished long ago. His departure for Gwalior evidently meant his death, but that death was more dreadful than that at the executioner's hands.

Were there no means for his rescue then?

He was not utterly helpless. Gayamal would try his utmost to save him. As for Motiya she had not given up all her hopes, yet. Was it possible for her to rescue him from Pluto's den.

No impossible.

The prince soliloquised —

'Neither Sailesh Roy nor Gul nor Dulali—none of them could forsake me but where are they now? Perhaps Gul is away for far-off Bengal finding our country in a serious trouble over the throne."

Though he revolved all this within his mind Lal Sahib found no means for his deliverance, at last he said to himself,—

Why should I die by secret poison or at the executioner's hands? I'll ask Moti to secure some poison which would finish us both and then we go to heaven together,

That the day was far advanced he had little idea of At this time a Mahamedan general¹ came up with the words,—

Prince your visit to the Taj has not been granted. Immediately after dusk you would have to start for Gwalior. The elephant would be in waiting for you. For your honour the Majesty has ordered one thousand Mogul cavalry just to escort you with this humble self as their general."

I bow to the Imperial mandate. But pray am I permitted to take a servant with me?

"There is no command as to that."

"Which servant you want to take with you please let me know and I will bring it to the emperor's notice."

Here I can trust only Gayamal the purveyor and no body else. I want to take with me the servant.

whom Gayamal brought for me."

"I don't think there would be any objection to your having this servant. However, I will convey your wishes to the Darbar. You just be ready—have to start as soon as it is dark."

With these words the general retired. The prince sat there silent for a long while; then he burst forth in an excitement —

"Should these infernal wretches allow Motiya to accompany me, we are sure to arrive at Gwalior."

It was close upon evening and yet Motiya did not turn up. The prince became sorely anxious for her. Was she arrested then and crushed to death under elephant feet? Alas! it was a great folly on her part to commit herself in this manner. He thought he was the root-cause of her death then. These conflicting thoughts had almost driven the prince mad. He could not sit in one place for some minutes together, but paced to and fro within the tent in an extremely perturbed state of mind. Was there such an unfortunate man as he? He in such a sorry plight though the emperor Shahjahan's grandson! Why was he born in the Mogul dynasty instead of in a poor family?

It was evening. It was all darkness within the tent. He was the only unfortunate man among the lac of persons in the tent. Had he been executed openly, he would not have suffered all this. His sufferings were simply intolerable. When it became

quite dark the Mogul general again turned up and said —

Come along, prince the elephant is ready'

I want to see Gayamal on the eve of my departure' was the modest reply

'Gayamal has started for Delhi at mid-day on some urgent political business' returned the general.

And his man? demanded the prince in a choked voice.'

'Which man you mean?'

"I mean the one who has served me as a valet to-day

"He has not been traced out. Probably he has gone with Gayamal. His Majesty ordered him to accompany you.

Lali Sahib spoke not a word. The elephant was just waiting outside his tent. With a despondent heart he ascended the Howdah in quiet. At this juncture a low and soft voice spoke out —

'Servant at thy sacred feet.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

PROTIVA'S RECOVERY.

We have said already what had been transpiring in Roshenara's pleasure-garden at the time when Lali Saheb was being taken to Gwalior at dead night and without any body's knowledge.

Dulali's suspicion proved to be correct after all. Protiva lay confined in Roshenara's Shismahal (bathing apartment) which was not known to any other body except the princess and her abigail Fatema. What Dulali had gathered from her short stay at the Rangmahal was nothing but correct.

There were two other persons who knew where the girl had been kept confined. One was Pandayji and the other Marwar Raj Jasobant Sing. Both these were present near the Taj that night and so had the opportunity of knowing that the poor girl was kidnapped and taken to Khushru Bag but by whom they did not know. None of them, however tried to rescue her from the present difficulty.

The reader already knows that Roshenara had not the slightest inclination to make over the girl to Murad's hands as she was too well aware of Murad's future fate. She also knew that Aurangzeb would succeed to the throne, it was imperative at the same

time that her sister must be won over. It was for the above reasons she decided inwardly that the girl in question must be married to Sultan Mahamad Auranzeb's son. She also thought Murad must be kept in hand and therefore she sent him word —

"Anyhow you would have her to the Taj at midnight when you must send your men just to kidnap her"

True the artful princess wrote to Murad to that effect only to see that no suspicion would be made upon her. We know what artifices Roshenara had adopted with the help of her bandi in effecting the poor girl's departure from the fort. Nor was this the only thing which she had recourse to she engaged other men to lie in ambush near the Taj so that the girl must any how be taken to the garden. She ordered Fatema to go out at that dead hour and follow Protiva only to see that her orders must be carried to the very letter. But her object was not fulfilled so easily as she thought it would.

Gani's men and Dulali as well as Sailesh Ray and Motiya stood in the way. Gani's men having been slain Murad's party caught hold of Fatema by mistake. Fatema again fell into Lali Sahib's hands who sent her in a palki towards the fort. Having taken advantage of the darkness on the way Fatema jumped out of the conveyance and ran into Roshenara's pleasure garden. What had happened afterwards the reader already knows.

It was morally certain that Roshenara's men could

not have concealed Protiva now that Fatema had fallen into Lalı Sahib's hands, and Protiva had also been taken away by Dulali, Motiya and Sailesh Ray. But who could over rule the decrees of fate. Protiva ran out of their hands inasmuch as she took them for enemies. The result was that from friends' hands she had fallen into enemies' hands at last, as Roshenara's men who lay in ambush gagged her mouth at once and kidnapped her. Since then Protiva was confined in Roshenara's Shismahal.

All this fell before the eyes of two other persons as the reader is already aware. The noctivagant Pandayji who was passing that way at this time happened to see this kidnapping of the girl. Such an occurrence was not an uncommon thing in those days, no doubt "yet who these men were and whom they were stealing in this fashion and this information gathered, there would be some chance of making some money out of it,"—thinking all this to himself Pandayji followed the man from behind up to the garden where the poor girl was taken at last, of course he had not come to know who the girl was, but when there was a sensation over Protiva's kidnapping he understood clearly that it must have been Protiva who was the victim. And we have also seen how Panday tried to make some money by giving this secret information to Jahanara.

But through irony of fate Pandayji's hopes were far from being fulfilled. Sailesh Ray told Lalı Sahib every-

thing who consulted with Motiya. Then Motiya saw Hingan Khan rather in disguise at his house just to pump him out as regards Protiva's whereabouts and the prince lay in ambush with a handful of trustworthy men close by.

Then what had happened the reader is aware.

When Pandayji had come to know that Motiya was a female spy he tried to stab her to death but the shrewd woman put out the lamp at once and moved away with the result that the weapon hit the old Hingan with whom Panday had a regular scuffle. Be it noted they could not make out each other on account of darkness.

On coming outside Motiya sounded the bugle. Outright the prince appeared with his attendants arrested both Hingan and Panday and took them both confined. All this was enacted in such silence that the neighbours got no scent of it. Hingan and Panday were thrown into the fort dungeon with a view to be pumped as to Protiva's whereabouts but scarcely before the day dawned there was a terrible sensation over the throne—so much so that Lali Sahib had no time to think of the imprisoned rascals. The result was that they had to rot within the den. The sentinels gave them a little water and some eatables on which they dragged their miserable existence. When Aurangzeb took possession of the fort a new commander was appointed. When this new man saw these skeleton-like fellows in the prison he released Hingan inasmuch as he was a courtier

and a parasite of Roshenara's. The poor fellow came home half-dead. He never got up from his bed. Having been laid up in the bed for a few months his vicious career came to an end.

As for the other villain (Pandayji), he was ordered to be turned out with a reward of a hundred stripes. The sentinels took him outside and regaled him with the ordered lashing at which the miscreant called his god but no body felt pity on him, on the contrary, he was rather an object of contempt and ridicule at the hands of the public when he was found in such a grief. As soon as he got his release the wretched rascal fled from Agra with bruise marks all over his body. Then what was his future fate no body knew.

Another person knew about Protiva and that was Jasobant Singh the chief of Marwar. The day he was staying in his boat on the breast of the Jumna, and pacing up and down the river side near Roshenara's garden, he noticed a few persons were just carrying a certain person into the garden. He took no particular notice of it as such a thing was of frequent occurrence in those days as has already been mentioned.

The following day he forgot about this altogether, but when he had heard about the kidnapping of the girl from the Begum Mahal the thing arose in his mind. It did not take an intelligent man like him long to see through the real state of affairs. He remembered all he had done with Murad regarding this girl, so he understood that the girl was concealed by Roshenara within

her garden. Had Roshenara entertained the slightest desire to make the girl over to Murad she would have been far from concealing her. Both Aurangzeb and Roshenara must have made some other move. The crafty Jasobant Singh thought to himself —

Why not make a move myself? Roshenara has stolen away this girl from her sister's hands and why should not Jasobant Singh avail himself of robbing the girl from Roshenara's hands now?

It has already been mentioned what conversation had passed between Jasobant Singh and Murad when the Marwar Raj called at the prince's camp in person. Whether Jasobant Singh had a desire to give this girl to Murad we cannot say, but his desire to confine him in the dungeon of Jodhpore for sometime was very strong. When he found his desire was not going to be fulfilled he totally forgot about the kidnapping affair. He now set out on a fight with Murad and Aurangzeb. Then what had transpired has all been said —

When Salleh Roy had heard for heaven's sake, don't kill Fatema he turned towards the prostrated woman and tied her hands and feet with his turban cloth. She lay down still and motionless.

Then Salleh rose and told Protiva not to utter a single syllable as a minute's loss meant a serious danger to their lives. With these words he caught hold of Protiva's hands and ran along with her.

In the twinkling of an eye he came outside and to

and behold—Dulali before him She now exclaimed in an anxious tone,—

"Here you are. My guess is quite correct. No time to lose here."

Protiva interrupted,—

"Fatema showed me the greatest attention possible. She would die if left in this condition—tied hands and feet"

Sailesh Ray replied,—

"The door is left open. When the gardeners would find the door open to-morrow morning they would bring her outside. Now hurry up"

"An outcry seems to fall upon our ear. Not a moment to be lost"

All the three ran outside with break-neck speed. Deep silence prevailed all over, but it seems there was a noise at a far off distance. When they got out side the garden Dulali remarked,—

"Their junketing not over yet? No—no, it has nothing to do will the galaday. The outcry seems to be close at hand. Now hurry up."

The noise became greater. The noise caused by men as well as horses' feet fell upon their ears. At times the sound of gunfire became audible. On getting to the river side Dulali said,—

"There must have been something very serious. I believe there is a riot going on in that quarter. The outcry seems to be louder. Have they come to know about our movements?"

All the three ran away as fast as their legs could carry. When they got to the boat, Dulali addressed the boat man—

"Go right up to the other side,"

The boat darted off like an arrow. For a single moment they had not been in safety their heart beat with great force none of them had the power to speak.

Gradually the noise came near the Jumna it seemed as if thousands of horses were running and along with it voice of innumerable persons became audible with one sound extremely frightful—So much so that it was beyond description. It seemed like the trumpeting of the elephant but that was so terrible that it would cause the heart to throb violently. There must have taken place some thrilling incident—there was not the ghost of a doubt as to that.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MOTIYA AS ELEPHANT DRIVER.

Lali Sahib's elephant was going, with five hundred Mogul Cavalry in front and five hundred behind. Should the prince endeavour to make his flight, he would be shot to death then and there—that was the Imperial command.

Thinking all his life's hopes frustrated the prince heaved a very heavy sigh when some voice spoke out in a low tone,—

“Thy slave at thy feet !”

On the elephant there was no other body but he and the driver. Both in front and behind there were cavalry guarding him. Who could it be then that uttered such cheering words ? Was it a dream or a mistake on the part of the prince ?

The same voice again uttered in an indistinct tone,—

“Come closer, please”

This time the prince understood that it was the driver who uttered these words. Who could it be ? What did the person tell him ? Was it not the driver who was sitting on the elephant ? He came near the Howdah slowly and stealthily. The cavalry behind him could not detect what he was doing owing to darkness.

In an extremely low tone the prince demanded —
"Who are you?"

Having come closer to the Howdah the driver replied in a soft tone —

"Your ever beloved Moti"

The prince could not account for the reason why he did not utter words of surprise. He was going to exclaim Moti but it seemed as if some body had throttled him and so he was disabled to speak out. Motiya uttered in a similarly low tone,—

"You must speak in a whisper there's no escape if we are caught"

In fact the prince's surprise was beyond description. He never dreamt he would find Moti in his life again. He felt astonished at her over-boldness and felt bewitched at her divine love. Finding her again in this sea of despair and difficulty his heart was filled with ecstasy. He demanded in a low and choked voice —

"How have you managed to come here?"

"My lord is it in any body's power to prevent the Jumna flowing into the sea? Thy slave will be at thy feet always. Thousand of Aurangzebs would not succeed in severing our connection."

The prince returned in a choked voice,—

"Why do you thus ask for trouble, my love? They would not show the least compassion on you if detected."

I don't expect any compassion from others. Only

speak low. They would ill hear our conservation if I drive in this manner,"

"Motiya, my hopes are all gone. As a captive I am going to the Gwalior fort from where I shan't get out."

"I, too, want to commit myself and remain imprisoned there"

"They would soon poison me to death."

"I have also got poison with me"

"You are a goddess. This vale of tears is not the place for you."

"My lord, have I not told you already that you are a God and so this earth is not the proper place for you?"

"Should it be so, you say you have got poison with you? Will you give it to me and we will take it together only to get rid of the hands of these villains"

"Darling, I would have died had I not entertained my hopes still? I have made every possible arrangement for our escape."

"One thousand Moguls are guarding us. There's no chance of our escape, not even the shadow of it"

"I have not given up the hope yet. If I could anyhow get to your maternal uncle's place in Rajputana, Aurangzeb could do us no harm. I hear Emperor Shah-Jahan, too, took shelter there and thus saved himself from his father's wrath."

"But I am made a captive. How can I hope for escape?"

"You can I have won over the driver with money and have thus taken up his duties by removing him away

Will you be able to drive the elephant?"

I drove many a mad camel in Persia when I was made a slave in my childhood could I not drive an elephant then? Just see how I have held him in.

What are the means of our escape now?"

'There are means still I have administered some poison to the elephant. In an hour's time he will turn mad and run a muck and then thousands of horsemen won't be able to overtake him or won't dare to come before him. Should we any how enter the jungle of the broken temple, these infernal wretches won't be able to trace our whereabouts."

The prince did not feel satisfied with Motiya's words. He considered it nothing more than nonsense and childishness on Motiya's part. But he did not consider it proper to thwart her indomitable energy and thus to wound her feelings. So he said --

'It is impossible to throw dust into the eyes of so many Maguls and to run away with the elephant and should the tusker turn mad it would be too difficult for you to keep him in hand The result will be the infuriated animal will take us any where and kill us."

Not unlikely Everything lies with God's will. I know death is inevitable. Why should I not make my last attempt to save you then?"

With a deep sigh the prince replied,--

"Peerless is your love ; unbounded is your courage. I admit all this , but my mind tells me all our attempts would be in vain "

"Why should I not make an attempt ?"

Lali Sahib sat silent for a while and then demanded,—

"Where is Gayamal ?"

"Lest any suspicion falls on him as to my actions and movements, he has gone to Delhi on plea of some business He won't forsake us. He has given me many gold coins which I have kept in my waist bag. We shan't be in want of money, you must know"

All on a sudden the elephant halted. Not having perceived this owing to darkness the front row of the cavalry behind came up under the elephant's feet, The elephant gave such a smart kick that about half a dozen horses with their riders fell to the ground and so the cavalry became dispersed. It was really a dreadful occurrence so much so that one fell upon another horse man's back.

With a strong move of the body the elephant gave out a loud trumpeting with his trunk raised,—then he ran on quite desperate. A few horse men became dashed into pieces through his trunk and so the whole Mogul army got dispersed and the infuriated elephant ran on and on. Lali Sahib held fast the sides of the Howdah with great anxiety lest he should fall down.

At first the elephant fell upon the Moguls and

trampled them under foot resulting in the loss of innumerable horses and Moguls. What soul-stirring events were enacted in that solitary path at that dead hour of the night was simply beyond description. Some of the Moguls hit the elephant with arrow and bullets and so the elephant got more infuriated.

Now Motiya tried hard to drive the animal towards the jungle. Having been a brave woman Motiya did not get bewildered even for a moment. Surely she would have out Nurjahanned Nurjahan had the Great Disposer of events willed it. The prince got surprised, nay astonished at her courage and bravery.

But all her attempts proved futile. As the effect of stramonium which Motiya had administered to the elephant, he went mad and so it was not in the power of man to keep him under control. Motiya could not turn the animal's course. She began to perspire all over. Now the animal took the way to Agra as it is the practice with animals to make for their homes. The animal ran towards Agra trumpeting all the way. The citizens who were enjoying sleep all woke up with terrible dismay. Thinking the whole earth was coming to an end the people began to invoke their gods in an extremely anxious tone.

Now Motiya asked the prince to take her over the Howdah as the elephant was trying to twist her with his trunk. The prince became almost stupefied when he heard this shocking news. Outright the prince bent forwards and drew his adored Motiya on to the Howdah.

without caring twopence for his own precious life.
Gasping he exclaimed,—

“Ah me ! What have you done, my angel ?”

“Where is the harm if a few Mogul villains pay the debt of nature ?”

“I don’t mean that. My point is we shall not escape at the hands of this infuriated animal ”

Motiya said in a firm tone,—

“Prince, I have not given up the hope yet. My object in taking him to the jungle has not been fulfilled ”

“Which way is he going to ?”

“Probably towards Agra. Having raised the trunk the elephant ran on trumpeting The swiftest horse cannot overtake the elephant when he runs and so the Mogul horsemen lagged behind, but they chased the elephant with great noise and uproar But it was not in any body’s power to overtake the infuriated animal

The prince repeated,—

“What is the remedy now ?”

Motiya replied,—

“The only remedy is to sit still and motionless Leap and you die The elephant must halt somewhere ”

“Then we are sure to be trampled under foot. There would be no means of escape ”

“Death is inevitable, my lord ”

“Should we escape any how we shall be made captives. Aurangzeb will surely take our head ”

'But we must finish ourselves before that."

The prince had not seen such a girl before. He paused for a while stupefied. No one had fallen into such a sorry plight as he therefore nobody could comprehend the workings of his mind then.

The elephant ran on with the swiftness of the lightning. Fortunately it was a straight path. The Howdah would have gone into pieces if it had dashed against a tree and in that case both the prince and Motiya would have been finished in a trice.

The elephant took the meadow path. Owing to darkness there were no means of determining which way the elephant was running. He only ran on desperately. At this stage Motiya ejaculated all on a sudden —

"My lord we are past danger"

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE BREAST OF THE RIVER.

In front was the river Jumna. On account of the burning sensation of the body the elephant ran on towards the river. The Mogul cavalry kept on pursuing him. They fired at times, but none of the bullets hit the animal on account of distance and darkness. The citizens were all roused from sleep by their terrible uproar and the frightful trumpeting of the elephant. The bells began to be rung at short intervals over the town as the fort was supposed to have been attacked by the enemy. The citizens became almost half-dead on the impression that the enemy had looted the town. Nobody was aware of the real state of affairs, only this much they knew that there must have taken place something very wrong in all Agra at dead hour of the night. Finding the Jumna in front Motiya exclaimed,—

“There’s no more fear, prince, the elephant is running towards the water. We must jump down anyhow”

“Not an easy thing. Should the elephant see us, we shall be drowned.” was the reply.

Motiya said in an emotion,—

“There’s no other alternative. We must try. A

hero you are. Why should you fear then? I a weak woman have no fear

You are a divine being whereas I'm a human being"

'My lord, put off as much clothing as you can be quick. We shall have to swim. Lose no moment"

With these words Motiya put off her garment except the cloth. She added —

"The gold coins also I have to drop down or I shan't be able to swim."

The prince said in a sad tone,—

"You have done your best, true. I find there's no means of escape. No use attempting further. Let me have poison."

Motiya replied grinding her teeth —

"Prince, just see I have left everything excepting these two things—sword and poison. Hope, too I have not given up yet. First the sword and then the poison

The elephant came to the river side and halted for a moment when Moti dropped her own clothing and those of the prince before him. For a while the elephant began to move these with his trunk. Before he could understand what Motiya was doing' Lali Sahib exclaimed in a dreadful tone,—

"What are you doing Moti?"

With a big jump Motiya sat on the elephant's neck. Her sword glittered in darkness. She bent over the elephant's head and pierced the weapon right through

it. This caused the animal to give out the loudest trumpeting and so the whole atmosphere shook, as it were. The elephant jumped into the water. Motiya exclaimed in a choked voice,—

“Prince, give a jump at once.”

The prince was unable to make out what had taken place or what Motiya had done. As asked by Motiya, he did give a jump. He was quite puzzled and bewildered having lost all powers of understanding. This much he felt he had fallen into the water and that the elephant was not there.

Immediately Motiya came up to the prince and said,—

“Swim as quickly you can. The enemy is about to overtake us.” With these words she caught hold of the prince's hands and took him to very deep water.

The prince gave a jump from behind the elephant. He went into the shallow water whereas Motiya had gone to the unfathomable water. At once she came to the prince swimming and then both of them went into deep water.

By this time the Mogul soldiers came up to the water's edge; but the night being dark, both Motiya and Lali Sahib could not be detected. As they were expert in swimming they went far into the strong current of the Jumna.

The enemy thought that the prince was drowned into the Jumna along with the elephant—an event beyond human conception. They were extremely frightened

that they could not act up to the command of the emperor. The Badshah would surely get exasperated with wrath and the result would be they would all receive death penalty. It was therefore that they were cogitating as to what they should do under the circumstances. They decided at last that the prince's death must be kept a secret. They would put forward that the elephant, maddened, ran towards Agra, but they turned its course and got the prince alight from elephant and then took him to Gwalior on horseback.

Thinking this advice sound all of them made for Gwalior as before. Aurangzeb did not get the scent of this affair. He was under the impression Prince Soleman was made a captive in the Gwalior fort like his younger brother. It was for this reason that all historians spoke of Soleman's death in the Gwalior fort. But we all know thanks for Motiya's courage, bravery and intelligence he was saved from the hands of the infuriated elephant that dreadful night. Since then Prince Soleman had not been heard of. Infact his name has been effaced from Indian History from that day.

What had transpired afterwards we are quite aware. Now the prince and Motiya both neared the Taj at that hour of the night. Motiya was trying to go to the other side and the prince accompanied her without a word. So long they kept silent.

When they came up to the Taj the prince exclaimed —

"Moti, God has in His mercy saved us after all Let us offer our heart-felt prayers near the tomb of our grand mother."

"Give up this hope, my lord. We are not safe here, Let's go to the other side."

"I wish I could. Beside you also promised that" was the reply.

"Do give up this hope of yours"

"Whatever you would tell me to do, I would do. Let's go to the other side Well, will you swim across the river?"

"I have swum across the Indus—a much larger river. No fear. But you would have enough of trouble."

"I am quite accustomed to swimming across the Jumna. Many a time in my childhood have been to the other side and back or how could I have learnt swimming?"

"Let's go to the other side then, we should rather be safe."

"But Aurangzeb would send thousands of men for my arrest and we are sure to be arrested."

"No body under the sun could arrest you. Even God won't be able to save our connection"

"You are my goddess. Pity I can't make you the sovereign of Delhi."

Why do you say this repeatedly and thus wound my feelings! The Delhi throne I care little for Let us go to the dense forest and live there as fakirs and in that case we shall be happier than any body else.

While on the breast of the fathomless Jumna the prince drew his adored Motiya and gave her several kisses on her lips. At this Motiya said in a choked voice.—

I consider myself happier than a thousand sovereigns of Delhi.'

All on a sudden the sound of splashing of the oar fell upon their ears and so both of them looked behind but nothing could be seen owing to darkness. By this time they instead of coming the otherside had gone far beyond agra through the strong current of the Jumna. During this time not a single boat came to their notice. At the time we are speaking of piracy was so common and so nobody could ply his boats at night without endangering himself. He would lie at anchor at any port and so both the fugitives felt extremely surprised at the splashing of the oars at such a dread hour of the night.

It must be some merchant's boat" observed Motiya.

"It is against Jaw to ply boats at night" was the reply

"Come let us go to the shore and conceal ourselves there."

"The coast is far away. Don't you see the boat has almost overtaken us."

Let's keep silent and we evade detection

"Don't you see it's the boat sent by Aurangzeb for our arrest. All your attempts go for nothing. Well

let me have poison which you have got in hand Remember, I am the last person to die by the executioner's hands,"

"Prince, they might not be Aurangzeb's men and even if they are, they might not detect us"

"Just notice the boat is going to fall upon us Poison is the only thing I must have recourse to I have no weapons with me and so can't die fighting."

"I would give the poison in exchange for a promise"

"Tell me at once. I'm not going to die by the executioner's hands"

"Just promise this,—you will not take the poison into your mouth until I take it. Should we actually fall into enemy's hands, I must take the poison first and then you."

"Very well, I do promise that. I can't live for a moment after I shall have lost you"

Motiya had poison in a small box tied to her waist While swimming she brought out the box though with extreme difficulty and gave one fill to the prince having kept the other to herself At this time a swift boat passed along them, they floated along like corpses having suspended their breath. Infact they could not be traced any how in the darkness

The boat plied on with the rapidity of lightning Though the boat passed close by them neither the prince nor Motiya could detect who they were. Only a female voice fell upon their ears,—

"Prince, Motiya, what's all this eh?"

This surprised them nay, bewildered them

In the twinkling of an eye the boat turned back and came to them. With extreme joy and cheerfulness Motiya snatched away the pill from the prince exclaiming —

No more fear God in His infinite mercy has sent us succour—our ever-beloved sister Dulal."

CHAPTER XXXI.

OUT OF DANGER.

Dulali had taken Protiva in her boat and had gone to the other side of the Jumna, but finding terrible tumult and trumpeting of the elephant she hid herself within a small trench. She felt extremely anxious to see if any body had come to ferret her out. But after a while all uproar subsided. She felt through the darkness that those who had come to the river side had left the place and yet to make herself doubly sure Dulali waited within the trench a little longer and then she proceeded towards Dayamani's house.

As soon as the floating couple fell upon Dulali's eagle eyes, she took these to be corpses and so exclaimed in a deep surprise,—

“Shahzada, Moti, what's all this, eh ?”

She immediately turned round the boat which came upon them at once. At this Motiya gave out a shriek of joy which filled Dulali's heart with delight.

Both the prince and Motiya, who had already become fatigued held the boat by the hand when Sailesh Ray was about to help her in getting into the boat. She said,—

“First the prince, then his devoted slave.”

When Lali Sahib had got into the boat, he held

Motiya by the hand and took her in. The prince and Motiya both felt extremely delighted to find Protiva there. Motiya rushed towards Protiva and having embraced her by the neck showered kisses upon her lips. The one looked upon the other as her uterine sister

Dulali observed —

"Prince I understand from your manner that you are a runaway and finding your Gul with us you also understand we are absconders too."

Lali Sahib replied —

Rather it is Moti who has saved me from the ruthless hands of Aurangzeb but we are not safe yet. Aurangzeb is not the man to sit idle. Now it is you who could save me and no body else."

"Should Aurangzeb come in battalions, he could not do you any harm. You need not worry on that account."

I'll lay down my life for you if necessary" intervened Sailesh Ray in an emotion

Where did you come by Gul and how? demand ed Lali Sahib.

Dulali said in reply —

Fatema must have made out Sailesh Ray. Probably she was the ugliest wretch under the sun. A short stay of the Begum Mahal has enlightened me on many things regarding her. Sailesh was in disguise and yet she would suspect him by guess. As for Roshenara she would surely suspect us."

With a great anxiety the prince returned —

"Then Roshenara would surely send Gama with his party for our arrest"

"There may not be any trouble at night as both Fatema and Khoja are lying tied hands and feet and the Durwan won't awake until to-morrow morning."

"But every thing would take air to-morrow how could I save ourselves under the circumstances?"

"I'm thinking over that. Disguise is of great help sometimes. No body could make out Motiya in the fort. Well, let's go to Dayamani's house and we will decide as to our future proceedings while there."

On being asked by Dulali the prince narrated every thing regarding Motiya's wonderful feat. When Dulali heard the prince through, she got startled exclaiming—

"Motiya must have been a silly fool to do all this."

So long Motiya was talking to her long-looked-for friend now she exclaimed,—

"Where would have been the prince had I not done all this?"

"Providential indeed is your rescue. No question as to that. But what was the fate of the elephant?" observed Dulali.

"Considering the wound caused on his head, the elephant must have been all but finished. He is also coming in this direction floating."

Dulali exclaimed in a surprise,—

"What courage! What strength of the body!"

Motiya replied in a laugh,—

"If the brain is just hit, it does not require much strength."

At this time the boat arrived at the *ghat* and all of them got down noiselessly. Dulali addressed the boatman —

Just go to Benares and wait there. Don't go away from there until we return. Start at once."

Motiya intervened —

"It would have been better I think if the boat had been with us, for we could easily then have taken to our flight if necessary."

The boat would simply raise suspicion in the minds of the enemy. Let's see what could be done now."

All of them entered Dayamani's house in silence. The old lady was asleep and so no body tried to wake her up. Dulali took them all into her own room and shut the door from inside. Then she said —

Cautionsness is its own safety. Who knows that Aurangzeb's men or those of Roshenara won't chase us here this very night?

The prince replied in an emotion, —

"I don't care for any body now. Here we have got arms and so can die fighting like heroes."

"I also court such a death" intervened Sallesh Roy. Dulali said rather in a taunt —

To die is not so difficult as to live. Prudent people always try to evade death. Our first duty is to see that you be metamorphosed into a different look lest the vile wretches fall upon us.

The prince replied,—

“What you propose we will abide by.”

Dulali returned,—

“We must have to submit ourselves to any fate in times of difficulty Prince, you have to pose yourselves as my palki-bearer for some time. Don’t you object to this”

The prince replied in a sad tone,—

“I have suffered from many a trouble and am prepared for more. Formerly I preferred death but now I long to live now that I am spared and am allowed to meet you Should I live, I might give condign punishment some day or other to the rascal who murdered father”

Dulali replied,—

“Why should you give up the hope ! A true hero ought not to be despondent. I would have sent you at a far off distance but I don’t dare to keep you apart from me”

The prince replied in an anxious tone,—

“I, too, don’t like to live apart from you”

“I have pondered over the matter and find that you ought to live with me I’m going to dress you as my palki-bearers and nobody would be able to make you out”

“I’m quite aware of your wonderful powers but I should think it would have been safer if we could have fled away by the boat.”

“Where could we have run away just to evade

Aurangzeb's wrath? Arrest would have been our fate and there would have been no escape, especially my mission is not complete yet. I have to see the Emperor once more."

Will he grant an interview?

I'll crave his permission."

Every one demanded in an extreme surprise,—

Are you really going to see him?

Dulali said in a grave tone,—

Until we are above suspicion in his eyes we shall never be in safety so I must see him."

'That means courting danger" returned the prince.

Dulali said —

"That can't be helped—if we mean to extricate ourselves from danger we must commit ourselves. I know too well that it is dangerous to go to the wily Aurangzeb who had spies all around. Knowing that I have to go and see him.'

The prince questioned in dismay —

Must we go with you?"

"That is the safest course. Should you remain with my palki-bearers, you won't be an object of suspicion. I will dress you in such a fashion that nobody would make you out."

Motiya intervened —

"Where shall we remain?"

You would all go along with me."

Well and good. I can't be apart from the prince in that case.'

"Moti, you won't have to be apart from the prince. Nobody under the sun could do that."

"How could you take them with you ?"

"They would go as my maid-servants and there would be no chance of being detected. We must start to-night. And I'll see Aurangzeb to-morrow morning. Probably nothing would come to his notice so soon and so there would be little ground for suspicion."

Perilous as the intended interview was, it was decided according to Dulali's suggestions. Then Dulali brought out her disguising apparatus and began to dress them all. She now learnt this art of simulation from her father Behari Charan who was second to none. Both the prince and Sailesh Ray became metamorphosed into Bengali palki-bearers so quickly under Dulali's skill that Dara would have failed to make his son out had he been alive.

Their dressing over, Dulali turned her attention towards Motiya and Protiva who were rolling in laughter covering their faces. In fact nobody could restrain a laugh at the appearance of the beloved grand-son of Emperor Shah Jahan.

Instantly Dulali metamorphosed Motiya and Protiva into old Bengali women.

When Motiya saw her own face in the looking glass she started up saying,—

"Good gracious ! what's this ?"

Their bright and beautiful face had been converted

into a grim and ugly one. Who could say they were young ladies

At last Dulali observed —

' Now you are above suspicion. Don't you think however you are out of danger yet. We are just going to face the tiger and must be very cautious. Don't you speak under any circumstances whatsoever. You must remember a dumb man has no enemies. Be very cautious."

Now Dulali told her servant something in a whisper. He returned after a while with the words that both palki and litters were ready. Without losing a moment all of them started. Motiya and Protiva got into the litters and Sailesh and Shahzada joined the bearers. Dulali's servant walked along with them. Every one kept concealed within the garments sharp-edged sword and poison. They thought that suicide was the only recourse in case of being arrested otherwise they would fall into the cruel jaws of death without the least chance of being rescued.

Who could depict the feeling working within the prince's mind at that time? He looked grave and absent minded when he weighed in his mind the seriousness of the work Dulali had on view. By the side of her palki both Sailesh and Shahzada were running with the palki bearers. Had such a fate ever fallen to the lot of any prince under the sun before?

CHAPTER XXXII.

WITHIN THE TIGER'S JAWS.

Within a short distance from Agra Aurangzeb lay encamped. He did not enter the Agra fort up to now as he did not dare coming before his father. How could he show his cursed face to the old Emperor? It was Aurangzeb indeed who ordered his brothers to be murdered. He it was under whose command so many persons were executed, but he never showed any disregard to his father. He had all the honour befitting his position. He was getting all the necessary expenses from Aurangzeb, only he was prohibited from going out of the fort. There he was all in all, being 'the monarch of all he surveyed'. In fact his word was law there. Aurangzeb however could not persuade him in regard into two things. Dara's daughter was living with Shahjahan within the fort. Her Aurangzeb wanted to be married to his son, but Shah Jahan threw cold water upon his proposal. Aurangzeb could not win over him nor could he take away the girl by force and so Shah Jahan got the upper-hand.

Aurangzeb asked Shah Jahan for a few Imperial gems which the latter did not part with. There was much correspondence between father and son over the matter, but here also the tyrant was defeated. He could not

take the gems in question under any circumstances. It was evident from the above, imprisoned as he was within the fort Shah Jahan was the absolute sovereign there. He enjoyed the former pomp and pageantry, riches and retinue luxury and what not. As for Jahanara, she had the sole influence in the Begum Mahal. Rather Roshenara had the reverse fortune having left the fort and joined his brother. On the eve of her departure she came to take the dust of her father's feet but Shah Jahan did not allow her an interview. Thinking it was unwise on her part to stay there any longer Roshenara left the fort.

With all that nobody was allowed an ingress into or egress out of the fort without the Emperor's permission. Aurangzeb's troops lay encamped besieging the fort. Now Aurangzeb had become the sole sovereign throwing his brothers and nephews in the background. Extensive was Aurangzeb's camp where he was staying with over a lac of soldiers under his command. Here they were discussing as to where they should go and subjugate whom.

In the morning Dulali's palki with two litters appeared before the Imperial camp. She had a written petition with her for the Emperor. At the cost of a few *askrafis* she could manage to send the petition to the Emperor through his private servant. The Emperor felt rather anxious when he read the petition.

He demanded —

"Who else is with her?"

"The palki bearers as well as two maid-servants in the litters" was the reply.

After a little reflection Aurangzeb replied,—

"Show the petitioner in. You must stand behind her with great cautiousness. Should you find any thing wrong with her, you must not scruple to chop off her head at once. Don't allow any other body in."

Seated on a common carpet and dressed in a common garment Aurangzeb was bidding his beads within his tent. Dulali appeared before him with a heaved heart. She noticed that the servant was standing behind her with a drawn sword in his hand. She expected death at every moment ; but as she had a bitter experience of the Mogul Court she was far from being bewildered with profound respect she *Kurnished* the emperor and kept standing there with clasped hands. She was quite aware that it was against etiquette to speak first before His Majesty.

"We are fully acquainted with your history along with our fathers and so we are so much indebted to you. I would consider myself fortunate for this kind interview. Why is all this formality, what do you mean by a petition, I must comply with your wishes as much as I can"

Could any body ascertain this was no other than the wicked Aurangzeb who had got his brothers murdered ? Dulali said in a tone of surprise,—

"Your Imperial Majesty!"

Started up Aurangzeb exclaimed,—

"This humble self is only the prince. Finding father too old for state affairs I have taken the helm of government in my own hands. This would surely bring him peace and comfort. Remember that my revered father Shahjahan is the Emperor"

"He is always kind to me" was the reply

"That I know I have heard everything concerning you from my sister Roshenara."

At this Dulali's heart heaved up. She joined Jahanara whom Roshenara did not like. She was afraid that Roshenara must have told him many things against her and that she had plunged herself into the sea of danger of her own accord. With a great difficulty Dulali controlled herself and then replied in a modest tone,—

"Your Majesty while staying in the Begum Mahal this slave was extremely happy enjoying the affection of all.

Casting a very rude stare at her Aurangzeb questioned in a slow tone,—

"Why did you deprive yourself of this happiness so suddenly?"

A fraternal quarrel having arisen amongst you I left the Begum Mahal. At one time I had a bitter experience of the quarrel amongst your father and your grand father in fact I felt myself quite disgusted with it and therefore I left the Begum Mahal and went to Dayamani's house.

"Right-ho You have had enough of this experience" replied Aurangzeb rather in a laugh.

"In your case the quarrel is amongst brothers but I have seen it between father and son"

You are right,—perfectly right. Do you know any thing concerning the where abouts of your countryman?

"No, I hear he was with the prince Soleman."

The Emperor had heard that the prince had a young warrior with him. Therefore he understood from Dulali's words that the young warrior was no other than Sailesh Ray. Now he said,—

"Very probably. Now what's your prayer?"

"Your Highness is now the Emperor. Your father gave my husband the Subedarship of East Bengal. But I have lost my husband. Now I have been on a pilgrimage having made over the charge of the office to my only son. Be kind enough to issue a firman in my son's name and place him in that post. This is my first prayer"

"Certainly I will. We are much indebted to you especially as the obedient son would never deprive a man of his rights which have already been granted by his father. Your son shall have both Khilat and firman from the court. Have you got any other request to make?"

"Yes, your Majesty. I'm going back to my native country for good and all. And therefore I'm so anxious to take the dust of the sacred feet of the old Emperor. Kindly grant me permission. This is my last prayer"

Fortunately for Dulali Aurangzeb had not heard anything about Lali Sahib's flight or about Protiva's recovery. Dara, Murad Suja—all these and their children were dead. Those that were alive they were confined within the Gwalior fort so that he could easily allow this weak woman go to the old emperor. With all her intelligence she was quite helpless, it was beyond dream that she could act against the emperor for that would mean her own danger. She could not be such a fool. Thinking all this to himself for a short while Aurangzeb said—

"Lest any body should go to the emperor and thus disturb his peace with various news. I don't allow any ingress but yours is a different case. You are an intelligent woman and so understand everything."

Dulali's heart became filled with joy. Having suppressed her emotions with great difficulty she replied,—

"In my childhood I meddled with state affairs much and acquired much experience thereby, but to speak the plain truth Your Imperial Majesty I'm quite sick of it." I'll return immediately after I have seen the old emperor.

Very well I grant you permission. I'm going to send a high officer to the fort so that none of the sentry would object to your going to the fort both in and out."

With a profound bow Dulali said with clasped hands—

This quite befits your august personage and reflects great credit on you—an incarnation of piety. Your Majesty lays me under a great obligation."

At the emperor's beckoning the khansama moved away from behind. With continued *kurnishes* Dulali left the emperor's camp. As for her companions who were waiting outside, their misgiving knew no end. Fortunately nobody cared to look at the Bengali bearers or old maid servants as every one was busy with their own within the camp. At a little distance from the camp the bearers began to enjoy a smoke having put down the palkis and the litters. Both the prince and Sailesh Ray seated themselves beside the litters with the sharp-edged swords within their garments. Their countenance bespoke so much bewilderment that any body would easily have suspected them if he had turned his eyes towards them but fortunately no body looked at them. So long as Dulali did not return, they felt extremely anxious.

Similar was the case with Motiya and Protiva. They had not the courage to remove the screen of the litters but they looked outside only through the screen. They felt themselves in the same plight as birds when confined in the cage.

At this time Dulali hastened in with the words,—
"To Agra at once,"

Dulali entered the palki and shut the door. The prince was about to speak but he controlled himself and ran along with the palki.

Their heart was anxious to ask various things but they were compelled to keep silent. They understood however that Dulali had received PERMISSION from the Emperor after all. In fact Aurangzeb was *OUT WITTED BY DULALI*

A short while after they noticed a general darting off towards Agra on horse-back indicative of *PERMISSION*

CHAPTER XXXIII

WITHIN THE AGRA FORT.

The palki and the litters entered the fort. No body prevented them from doing so as Aurangzeb had sent word already. Howsoever cruel he had been with his brothers, howsoever hostile he might have been with the Hindus—with all these faults Aurangzeb could not have been counted as devoid of any good qualities or that he was demoniacal in any way. He never showed any disrespect towards his old sire and he granted Dulali permission to go and see the old Emperor thinking that act on his part would satisfy his father to some extent. It must be told here no body was allowed an ingress into the fort now a days. It was ten to one he would not have shown this favour a few months ago. Now he had no rival being the suzereign lord of all India. Especially he left Agra openly and established his Capital at Delhi—the capital too well known to the Mogul and the Mahamedan.

When the palki arrived at the door of the Begum Mahal Dulali called Gani, Princess Jahanara's chief eunuch and addressed him,—

"I have been here with Prince Aurangzeb's permission I want to see the Princess. I have got two maid servants with me."

The other eunuchs who had accompanied Gani felt extremely surprised at finding an outsider within the fort. They began to look at the palki with steadfast eyes, as it was rather a novel sight.

Gani replied,—

"You are always at liberty to come into the fort but as there have been so many changes here, it is but my duty to send word to the Princess which I must do at once."

As soon as Gani left Dulali addressed the other eunuchs —

"You just move away I wish to speak to my servants."

They moved away at once as they all of them knew her. They also knew how much the old Emperor and her daughter regarded her.

Then Dulali beckoned to Lali Sahib and Sailesh Ray to step up to her and so they came near the palki with severish anxiety.

Dulali observed —

True it is we have extricated ourselves from the jaws of the tiger but we are not safe yet. Until we leave this country we shall not be out of danger. Be extremely cautious. True we have not got any enemies here but we are not safe yet."

At this time Gani returned with the words,—

"The princess has ordered me to usher you in with profound respect."

"I have got two female servants with me."

"They must accompany you,"

"But what about my male servants?"

"They would receive proper care and attention"

With hasty steps Dulali entered the Begum Mahal, accompanied by Motiya and Protiva who were in the litters. We remember too well the day these two women left the Begum Mahal. Let us compare this day with to-day. We are too well aware of what dangers and difficulties they had fallen into since their disappearance from the Begum Mahal and we know not what changes had taken during these few months within the Mogul empire, nay in the history of India. They had all been saved from the terrible jaws of death even now their danger had not come to an end. It was beyond the power of pen to describe the feelings of their minds at this stage.

Both Motiya and Protiva entered their respective quarters with a heaving breast. Could they be recognised in their disguise? Could they possibly get out of the Begum Mahal in the same dress they had on? Could the princess make them out?

They were not aware in the least what actuated Dulali to bring them here. They could easily have returned to their native country if they had willed but instead of allowing them this thing Dulali had placed them before the jaws of death; not only so, both the prince and Sailesh Ray were not safe here even for a minute. Both were reluctant to part from each other, but there was no help for it. Motiya looked back twice

as she had not the least desire of going in. She said to herself—

“There is not the least danger here as the place is full of our princess' people.”

She found that Gani was paying particular attention to their comforts and conveniences.”

Extremely solicitous Jahanara was awaiting Dulali's arrival at her door. As soon as she found Dulali she advanced up and having caught Dulali's hand with great tenderness, she exclaimed—

“Come in, sister I'm so glad to find you here. I wonder how you managed to get into the fort. The eunuch was telling me you secured Aurangzeb's permission. This is the first day an outsider has been allowed an ingress.”

“Thanks to un-dreamt-of favour the Shahzada has granted me permission. I called on him at his camp and craved for an interview with the emperor.”

“Why Shahzada? Aurangzeb has proclaimed himself the emperor during emperor's life time. We are but prisoners in the fort. Now pray who these two are.”

“They are my maid servants. I wish to speak to you something in private.”

“Surely the Badshah will be glad to see you.”

When both of them entered the quarters Dulali whispered something into the princess' ears. Started up the princess turned round and behind her two old maid servants followed by the princess' handis. For

while she rivetted her gaze towards Motiya and Protiva and then she addressed her own Bandis,—

“I’ve got something to tell Dulali in private ; you just go elsewhere.”

Instantly the Bandis cleared away. Now the princess bolted the door with her own hands. Then she exclaimed,—

“Wonderful powers indeed ! I don’t believe you.”

Pointing to the small box Dulali had in her hands, she said,—

“This box contains all these apparatus”

The Shahzadi re-exclaimed,—

“A veritable prodigî you are ! who could make them out ?”

Then she stepped up towards Motiya and Protiva. She did not take long to understand that it was they about whom Dulali had just spoken to her. They did not know how they would be received by the princess as they felt themselves extremely guilty before her. Like wooden dolls they kept standing still and motionless

On stepping up to them the Shahzadi gave them slaps on their cheeks out of mere tenderness, exclaiming,—

“Oh ! you naughty girls ! Being unable to control their emotions both of them embraced the princess by the neck and having placed their head on her shoulders they burst into tears That was indeed a wonderful sight !

The princess kissed them ugly as they were, out of mere affection. Infact she loved these girls as her own daughter. Now the princess addressed Dulali—“Sister clean their faces as I feel pained to look at these. Though I admire you for your abilities I long to see my Motiya and Protiva.”

“Would that be safe? I can't trust your Bandis even. Should it come to Aurangzeb's notice, there would be no escape.” replied Dulali.

You are right, but I think I could safely trust my Bandis.”

“We shan't be safe until we leave this country.”

Sister you would surely go to your own country. I ought not to stand in the way as you have got relatives there. But why should they go? They are my pet girls.”

Now Dulali related to the princess every thing regarding Motiya and Protiva.

On hearing all this the princess assumed a grave appearance.

Then she addressed Dulali slowly—

“Aurangzeb could do them little harm. Oh! how much he persuaded father to marry his own son to Dara's daughter but in vain. Who could dare to take my Bandis or my pet girls?”

Dulali whispered something more into her ear at which the Princess gave a big jump. She ejaculated in a choked voice,—

“What do you mean? Our pet boy Lall!”

country and go with me to-morrow. He will be quite happy with Motiya in a far off country. Should he be in the land of the living he might be the Emperor one day, whereas he won't escape death if he stays here."

Jahahara was absorbed in a deep thought and so did not speak. Dulali added —

"Pratima is not safe here as princess Roshenara won't let her off

At this Jahahara stood to her legs with the words,—

"Just wait here, all of you. Let me go to His Majesty and tell him every thing. Having locked the room from outside Jahahara hastened away

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A UNIQUE SPECTACLE.

The spectacle before our eyes is simply beyond compare. The room was made of marble, on which were carved various birds and flowers, plants and creepers. The whole ceiling was decked with gold from one end to the other. Oh ! what exquisite workmanship. - Oh ! what settings, with gems and jewels, the glitter of which dazzled the eyes. Beautiful thousand-armed chandeliers of different colours were hanging from the ceiling. From these were burning the highly-perfumes candles the soft light of which illumined the whole chamber. Nice garlands of jessamine were seen festooning from one chandelier to another. Large looking glasses and pictures set on gold-frames were hanging on the walls the latter looking like living beings. The images of all Emperors from Babar down to Shah Jahan were adorning this room. On the walls beautiful walls shades, the light of which made the mosaic work of the walls more conspicuous. On the floor was spread a large sheet of velvet inlaid with gold. There were jewelled otto-pots and rose water vases all over which filled the whole room with nice fragrance. Their beauty which shamed in gracefulness the beautiful heaven was simply beyond description.

On one side was Shahjahan's peacock throne.

How could do we describe this unique thing ? Shah jahan had this throne made at an expense of crores of rupees towards the sitting of which Shahjahan had this Jui Mahal constructed at an expense of a vast sum of money The long tail of the peacock was set was costly gems. One could not look at it without his eyes being dazzled This wonderful throne was unique of its kind.

There were on the throne soft beds and bolsters of scarlet colour studded with gold. At this dead hour of the night the old Emperor was lying down in a recumbent posture. Supreme silence reigned everywhere with no noise or sound either in the fort or in the Begum Mahal Such an awful silence was not known before.

Dressed in a gaudy dress and decked with various ornaments two handsome bandis were fanning the old Emperor with gold chāmars (tail fans) one on each side. The Emperor had the princess (Jahanara) beside him.

Seated on his knees prince Soleman was waiting upon the Emperor in front. Beside him was Motiya both of them were dressed in precious ornaments. Their beauty and comeliness made the room elegant a hundred times. Behind them Sailesh Ray and Protiva were sitting on their knees. They too had an elegant dress on

Such a nice spectacle was unprecedented in the Mogul palace.

One becomes absorbed in grief at finding the Emperor an incarnation of emaciation, dejection and debility. Though in the midst of luxury and enjoyments the Emperor was a picture of woe and misery was evident from his very countenance

The Emperor observed rather in a soft tone,—

“That I find you, my boy, in these last days is a fact which infuses nectar into my distressed heart. The moment I was deprived of my beloved Mam-Tajmahal I felt I lost everything. Since then I was quite callous to my sufferings. Now go to Bengal. I grant you permission. A Mogul is a stranger to happiness when he becomes the emperor. Never hanker after the throne for heaven’s sake. I tell you all this as I love you from the core of my heart”

The Emperor became silent. The heart-rending words that had come from the emperor’s lips filled the eyes of these present with tears. Lali Sahib tried to speak but could not articulate a single syllable. The emperor’s eyes, too, became filled with tears. Having controlled himself with great difficulty he added softly,—

“Lali, my dear, I grant you permission to marry Motiya who has saved you from death. Thanks to her you come here in flesh and blood”

Silence again. Solemn silence every where, after a while the Badshah added,—

This old man has no strength in his body now. You and your father (Dara) made me forget to some

extent my Mam Tajmahal whom I loved dearer than my own life. But God deprives me of this happiness now Go I give you permission."

Everyone perceived that the emperor's heart became rent while uttering these words. As for Jahanara both her eyes streamed forth infact no body could restrain their tears. Bathed in tears Lali Sahib and Motiya rose softly and touched the emperor's sacred feet. Upon this, the emperor addressed Jahanara,—

My darling you are my only hope and solace in the evening of my life. Just help me in placing my hands on their heads and I will offer my hearty benedictions to my beloved Lali.

In tears the loving daughter raised the feeble hands of the father and placed the same on Lali's and Motiya's hands.

The emperor exclaimed in a choked tone,—

' May you be happy always.

Having embraced the grand father's feet with his hands Lali Sahib burst into tears with the words,—

"Your Majesty I won't leave you infact I can't."

He could speak nothing more, his voice having been choked.

The Badshah could not speak for a long time. His heart heaved with force. He tried hard to control himself. Silently and despondently he kept on leaning upon the bolster in a listless manner.

Tears welled out of every one's eyes in torrents. The Badshah exclaimed —

"My child, I can't save you from the hands of the enemy."

Lali Sahib exclaimed in sobs,—

"I want to die here."

"No, no. That can't be. In that case you won't find me alive. I shall die in peace only if I hear you are living. Go to Bengal. Don't be anxious on my account. Don't disobey my words. To-day I bind you both with the tie of marriage. This is the last day I sit on my beloved peacock throne"

Tears all around Tears were visible on the emperor's eyes now. The princess wiped off the tears in tenderness with her own costly handkerchiefs.

What a heart-rending spectacle! On one hand the empire of luxury and happiness, on the other the home of gloom and despondency. Alas! In the Jui-Mahal this was the sad plight into which Shah jahan, sovereign lord of all India had fallen. Is there anything which fate cannot work? The Badshah exclaimed again rather in a soft tone,—

"Jahanara, my dear, all the jewels in my possession together with all the gold coins you could gather—give these all to my beloved Lali"

At this Lali ejaculated,—

"Your Majesty! Nothing I want. I'll live the life of a dervish anywhere."

"No, darling, that cannot be. You have lived in the midst of luxury and enjoyment of the Begum Mahal. You can't therefore suffer any hardship or privations.

It would pain me very much if I hear you are in distress
No you just comply with my wishes.

Jahanara replied —

Your Majesty I have made every possible arrangement for that. Lali is not safe here for a moment. To-morrow morning he would leave the fort.

The Badshah exclaimed in a choked voice —

'Right ho. He ought to.

Whose hands I am going to put Lali into—those would try to protect him even at the risk of their own lives. As for Gul Bahar I have made over her into the hands of this Bengali youth. Whatever I have in my possession all these I have given her" replied Jahanara.

The Badshah replied in an indistinct tone,—

Now go."

Upon this both Sailesh Ray and Protiva stepped up to the emperor in tears and took the dust of his sacred feet. The Badshah exclaimed in sobs —

"Gul I loved you very much Go and live in happiness. This is my last benediction

Both Sailesh Ray and Protiva burst into tears not having the power of articulation. When they moved away Dulali came up and touched the sacred feet of the emperor. The emperor exclaimed —

"Dulali, dear it is you who saved this poor miserable being one day. If you could save Lali now that would mean saving Shahjahan of Dehli. Now go. May the All Merciful Ruler protect you in His infinite mercy"

Then he addressed Jahanara,—

“I feel too tired, darling, lay me down on the bed now.”

At this all of them held the emperor in great tenderness and raised him. Leaning upon the princess' shoulders he went to the adjoining room and lay down there, Lalı Sahib and others went to the princess' quarters in tears. No body witnessed this thrilling scene save and except two bandis.

The following day all of them left the fort in the same disguise with which they had come here. When Lalı Sahib came to Benares he took the Hindu name. Then they got to Patna in safety. Protiva's parents were filled with ecstasy on the recovery of their beloved daughter. With great pomp Protiva was married to Sailesh Ray and then they proceeded to the far-off town Birbhum and lived there. They had not the least want of money.

Now reader, “Who was happy, Lalı Sahib or Aurangzeb?” “Who won the victory—the grand-son of the old Emperor or his wicked son?” Love can command happiness, peace and victory. There is nothing like love in this wide world.

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